

LAST ACTS:
THE ARTS OF DYING, THE GOOD DEATHBED AND THE EARLY MODERN STAGE

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Abstract:

“Last Acts” examines the intersection between early modern understandings of proper deathbed behavior and dramatic representations of death. Dying is understood in homiletic texts as a set of postures and actions that can be performed well or badly. Dying is something to do as much as something to suffer. There are, however, widespread disagreements about the eschatological significance of deathbed behavior, and also about the specific form it should take. These controversies ensure that representations of the deathbed are rich places in which to investigate shifting understandings of the nature of, and the interactions between, the individual, the social and the supernatural. To demonstrate the importance of this tradition, I draw out the theoretical assumptions of the *artes moriendi* and show how they influence representations of dying in plays from mid-Tudor morality interludes and Marlowe’s *Doctor Faustus*, through Shakespeare’s *Richard II* and Ben Jonson’s *Volpone*, to Cyril Tourneur’s *The Atheist’s Tragedy*. I highlight playwrights’ use of dramatic deathbeds underpinned by Christian understandings of the good death to theorize different forms of agency and so to reflect changing ways of thinking about the self, about shifting political and economic power, and about the disputed nature and purpose of the theatre.

Drama’s particular ability to trouble distinctions between activity and passivity, or seeming and being, makes it especially suited to think about what it means to die actively. Moreover, the perplexing notion of an active practice of dying also provides playwrights with analogies for thinking about the similarly perplexing notion of dramatic performance. Arguing for a continuous and productive (if

sometimes contentious) exchange of ideas and rhetorical strategies between homiletic and dramatic writing, I intervene in debates about the role of the theater in the rise of the secular public sphere. By situating my authors' understandings of dying within a line of thought that considers how individual and collective identities are shaped and defined by orientation toward death from Paul and Augustine through to Roberto Esposito, I demonstrate that the *ars moriendi* tradition has responded to and influenced wider discussions about how death is understood socially, spiritually and philosophically.

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INTRODUCTION

What will we do when we die? Imagine a man suddenly falls sick. His friends visit him two days later and find him prostrate, tormented by pain and cursing the day he was born. By reminding him of the inevitability of mortality and of his religious duty to be patient, they bring him to accept that he is dying. The man makes a will and gathers his family around him to say goodbye. Next, he recites his articles of faith and he and his friends pray together for his salvation. He expresses fear that his sinful life will result in his damnation, but as his body fails him, he puts his trust in Christ as his redeemer and savior. After he dies, his friends evaluate his end, agreeing that his good death implies that he will be saved, and hoping that they themselves will be given the grace to die similarly.

This narrative is drawn from Thomas Becon's 1561 *The Sicke Mans Salve*, a dialogue modeling the proper Christian approach to death.¹ Becon's tract exemplifies the *artes moriendi*, a homiletic genre of texts teaching the art of dying well that flourished between the fifteenth and eighteenth centuries.² Though Becon represents a specific reformist Protestant doctrinal position and speaks to a particular puritan community, the account he gives of what a good death should look like is not vastly different from those found across a range of Catholic and Protestant homiletic texts spanning almost three hundred years.³ In each case, a *moriens* is expected to resist a distinct and recurring set of deathbed temptations –

impatience, despair and excessive worldliness – and instead express repentance and affirm his faith.⁴ Ideally, neighbors, friends and family members will be gathered around him to offer support, guidance and prayer and to evaluate his actions.

The arts of dying assume that death is not only suffered. It is also an act that can be executed well or badly. My dissertation explores what the mode of action proper to the deathbed is, and how it relates to other ways of acting in the world. Dying, I show, becomes a productive site for theorizing the nature and limits of human agency. Because of the severe practical limitations on what can be expected from a *moriens*, the deathbed spurs writers to think about the minimal requirements for willed action, and to ponder what it is that separates it from simply being. In striving to explain how somebody wracked by pain, exhibiting diminished mental capacity or unable to speak can nevertheless be understood to have achieved a good Christian death, the writers of *artes moriendi* develop sophisticated models of action, which blur distinctions between activity and passivity or between the words and motions of the *moriens* and of those around him acting on his behalf.⁵ For Protestant writers in particular, the deathbed is also an important site for confronting the limitations placed on human action by predestinarian theologies.⁶ As I will show, the understandings these texts develop of what is being done on the deathbed can be used to theorize action more widely. The postures advocated in the *artes moriendi* become especially attractive to dramatic authors, who draw on homiletic models to explore the nature of human agency in different theological, political, social and economic contexts. In particular, playwrights find powerful stimuli within the tradition for thinking about the social and performance

conditions in the theater, as a space that raises analogous questions about the agency enabling embodied performance.

In arguing for the sophistication of the *ars moriendi* tradition and its continued relevance to the secular theater, I depart from most critics who have previously considered the staging of dying. Michael Neill's *Issues of Death*, for example, surveys the relationship between Renaissance death culture and literature, and dismisses dying well as a dull business and the *ars moriendi* tradition as a medieval hangover. Neill emphasizes the passivity of the conventional *moriens*, and contrasts the orthodox interests and presuppositions of *ars moriendi* authors unfavorably with a subversive, classically inspired impulse to reclaim the *mors improvisa* as a liberatory or aesthetic experience.⁷ Even critics who are willing to acknowledge the *artes moriendi* as influences on the depiction of mortality onstage generally reduce them to a series of conventional expressions and poses that mark residual medieval influence, or that quickly become duplicitous impostures, evacuated of religious content in a manner that exemplifies the secularizing tendencies of the theater.⁸

Discounting devotional practices and intent appears less justifiable in light of the work of a number of scholars who, over recent years, have emphasized the importance of religious life and thought to early modern culture and literature. The so-called religious turn reacts against varieties of New Historicism that valorize radicalism or subversion in literature and dismiss orthodox cultures of religious belief as monologic expressions of the dominant ideology. By encouraging a reassessment of mainstream religious thought, critics such as Debora Shugar have

revealed that the dominant religious culture was “In some respects... more radical, probing, and self-critical than has often been assumed, in others... more primitive, more alien from our own habits of thought, closer perhaps to those of traditional societies.”⁹ This line of thinking has uncovered the extent to which historical shifts commonly understood as external challenges to the established church (for instance, the increasing desacralization of social life and the political sphere) are also the subject of internal debates within the Church.¹⁰ Most relevantly to my project, a number of critics have been inspired to reconsider the relationship between divinity and the stage, and to challenge the earlier critical orthodoxy that this is characterized by mutual antagonism.¹¹

I aim to show that the *artes moriendi* constitute an important part of this devotional context. To say, as Neill does, that the art of dying is a residual practice is simply untrue. The genre is late medieval in origin but has a long, vital subsequent existence. Though it is possible to identify some antecedents among the writings of the early fathers and in the devotional works of the thirteenth century, the text generally understood to have created the genre is the *Tractatus Artis Bene Moriendi*, written some time in the first half of the fifteenth century and then translated into English around 1490 as the *Crafte and Knowledge For to Dye Well*.¹² In Europe as a whole, *artes moriendi* circulated most widely between 1470 and 1520.¹³ However, in England more various and original examples were produced in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries than had been previously.¹⁴ Jeremy Taylor’s *Holy Dying*, today the most famous of the texts, was published in 1651 and new arts of dying were still being produced in England at least as late as 1711.¹⁵

Additionally, *artes moriendi* do not represent a static theological attitude or doctrinal position. Though the fundamental scenario they treat remains unchanged, and though strong family resemblances exist between all texts in their advice on how to combat deathbed temptations, the basic model is easily adapted to take account of shifting theological ideas and contexts. Rather than constituting a holdover that thinkers interested in the reformation of medieval Catholicism necessarily reacted against, the genre often became a medium for debate and innovation. Protestant thinkers from Luther onwards adapt the basic formula of the *Tractatus* to accommodate changed understandings of grace and free will, and in the hands of writers including William Perkins and Jeremy Taylor, arts of dying can become occasions for polemic against rejected Catholic deathbed practices such as Confession, the anointing of the sick, appeals to saintly intercessors and prayers for the dead.¹⁶ Counterreformation authors such as Petrus Luccensis and Robert Bellarmine respond in kind, reaffirming the necessity of Catholic ritual practices at the deathbed.¹⁷ Theological debate is carried out within the arts of dying rather than in reaction to them.

Artes moriendi, moreover, also accommodate and contend with social pressures as they attempt to define the boundaries between living and dying and between worldly and holy approaches to death. The deathbed is a place where divines and other spiritual advisors have to compete for the *moriens* with representatives of his worldly interests and attachments. And as many *ars moriendi* authors recognize, the moment of death can have significant economic, social, philosophical and political repercussions as well as religious ones. How we

understand what *morientes* are doing when they are dying may affect how we understand constructions of intergenerational relationships and assertions of social bonds both inside and outside the family; links between mind, body and spirit; and transfers of worldly authority or economic substance either automatically or through documents such as wills. Though turning away from the world is always the ultimate goal of a dying Christian, many texts offer their readers advice on how to negotiate between alternative modes of sacred and secular discourse and respond to immediate social and material conditions.

Three different sets of examples can illustrate the wide range of contexts in which *artes moriendi* situate religious approaches to death. First, several European Protestant texts addressed to audiences living under Catholic control are keenly interested in the relative claims of political and faith communities. They modify features of the tradition to provide advice on negotiating anti-Protestant legal and ecclesiastical institutions. One example of how to do this can be seen in the *Evangelish lere und vermanung eines sterbenden menschen*, an anonymous guide written for German Lutherans living in a Catholic state.¹⁸ The *Evangelish lere* adapts a standard piece of advice that a *moriens* should avoid disputing with the devil on doctrinal matters. The valorization of a posture of non-engagement is found in the writings of Erasmus among others. Erasmus imagines a confrontation in which the devil is confounded by a *moriens* who answers every question on doctrine “with a compendious way as the church believeth. Agayne, whan [the devil] objected, howe dothe the church beleue? Marye, quod he, as I beleue. How dost thou beleue? As the church beleueth.”¹⁹ The *Evangelish lere* advocates analogous postures of

equivocation for Protestants who are catechized on their deathbeds by Catholic clergy and whose property would be at risk of seizure if their beliefs were revealed.²⁰ By contrast, another set of texts organized around the monitory bad death of the Italian apostate Francesco Spiera, emphatically rejects such temporizing and uses the occasion of the deathbed to explain how to hold out against the temptation of apostasy.²¹ *Artes moriendi* and related texts are an appropriate medium for evaluating the social consequences of the emergence of Protestant sects.

Second, arts of dying may take into account alternative philosophical or scientific understandings of death. Thomas Lupset's 1538 text *The Waye of Dyenge Well* represents an attempt to rework the genre for an educated humanist audience with an interest in Classical thought. The text advocates a Christian practice of dying but supplements it with descriptions of exemplary Roman Stoic approaches to death and quotations from Epicurus as Lupset attempts to integrate Pagan philosophy into a Christian worldview.²² At the latter end of the century, William Perkins in the *Salve for a Sicke Man* attempts to adjudicate between the proper roles of religious and medical care, and between theological and natural philosophical understandings of dying. Perkins insists that spiritual matters must come first, and that "it is a thing much to be disliked that in all places almost the phisition is first sent for, and comes in the beginning of the sicknesse, and the minister comes when a man is halfe dead, and is then sent for often times when the sicke party lyes drawing on and gasping for breath."²³ Nevertheless, he acknowledges that doctors have an important place at the sickbed, and treats their practice seriously by

distinguishing between forms of medicine that should be avoided as counterproductive or superstitious and those “grounded vpon some good naturall reason.”²⁴ His rejection of a given medical practice is as likely to be based on its scientific inadequacy as on its religious implications.²⁵

Third, *ars moriendi* can be used to ground political polemic since a *moriens* is expected to put his earthly affairs in order, evaluate his past conduct, make provision for his dependents and dispose of his property and offices. This potential was realized particularly effectively by Charles I in the run up to his execution. The *Eikon Basilike* bears a close relation to the *ars moriendi* tradition, and takes the religious preparation for death as an occasion to articulate a defense of Charles’s absolutist monarchy. The format of the deathbed confession of sins and declaration of articles of faith becomes an expedient opportunity for the King to justify his political actions.²⁶ However, political polemic can also motivate the reclassification of a given approach to death as bad. Milton’s *Eikonoclastes* is an attempt to undermine the effectiveness of the *Eikon Basilike* in part by recasting it as a bad or blasphemous approach to death.²⁷

As these examples indicate, the type of behavior proper to the deathbed conditions, and is conditioned by, a broader field of human thought and action in the world. And this integration within the world makes the *artes moriendi* especially valuable for studying the role of devotional traditions in the process of secularization. They help us to track shifts in the boundaries between the sacred and the secular and to see the extent to which religious and worldly modes of thought influence and learn from one another. When, how and why England moved from

being a state that enforced a theological-political totality to one dominated by non-religious institutions has been widely and vigorously debated.²⁸ Most commentators agree that the intellectual and social upheaval of the Reformation played a significant role in the process, but disagree about which factors were most significant and about whether social change was driven by intellectual change or vice versa. One thing that the *artes moriendi* reveal is that shifts in popular belief systems and religious behavior, and changes in the balance of power between sacred and secular institutions, occur unevenly. To account for this, I draw on Charles Taylor's understanding of secularization as "a move from a society where belief in God is unchallenged and indeed, unproblematic, to one in which it is understood to be one option among others, and frequently not the easiest to embrace."²⁹ Rather than emphasizing the shift from belief to unbelief, or the migration of ideas of the transcendent from a sacred to a political sphere, it might be worth focusing on the increasing dialogue and exchange between different religious and non-religious modes of discourse. Within the secularity Taylor envisages, devotional practices and the aspirations they encode no longer form part of a master narrative, but do persist and continue to interact with other ways of being in the world.³⁰

As will become evident over the course of my dissertation, the arts of dying and the theatrical representations they inspire are particularly rich sites for considering how such a form of secularity—along with other aspects of modernity—might emerge in early modern culture and literature. The deathbed is a space where religious understandings of the approach to death have to negotiate with legal,

political, social, economic and medical ones. Additionally, the practice of dying necessarily draws attention to the body of the *moriens*, as the recalcitrant instrument through which he is required to perform his death, and as the outward signifier that onlookers scrutinize to evaluate and classify his end. In consequence, it becomes an important site for identifying early forms of biopolitical thinking.

The writers of mid-Tudor morality plays, along with Christopher Marlowe, William Shakespeare, Ben Jonson and Cyril Tourneur, draw upon conventions and assumptions embedded in the *artes moriendi* in order to explore the possibilities for human action in different theological, political, social and economic contexts. Playwrights notice the deathbed resembles the stage, another mixed space where attention is drawn to embodied performance, and which inspires similar debates about appropriate boundaries between the sacred and the profane. At least initially, this influence travels in two directions. *Ars moriendi* authors such as Erasmus and Becon adopt dialogic modes of presentation that appear to owe much to drama in order to represent spiritual conflicts and appropriate interactions between *morientes* and onlookers. Furthermore, early morality plays are sometimes envisioned as presentations of prose *artes moriendi* in another form. *Everyman*, a play entirely focused on the proper approach to death is described in one printed edition as a “treatyse how ye hye fader of heuen sendeth dethe to somon euery creature to come and gyue a counte of theyr lyues in this worlde... in maner of a morall play.”³¹ Over time, devotional writers express increasing hostility towards the theater, while playwrights become more likely to emphasize the limitations of purely devotional postures and of the persons who most strongly advocate them.³²

Yet even when dramatists' relationships to homiletic authors become more oblique or antagonistic, they still remain strongly attuned to homiletic understandings of the approach to death, and to the modes of action it entails.

Plays such as *Doctor Faustus*, *Volpone* and *The Atheist's Tragedy* can in fact be read as metatheatrical meditations on whether dramatic modes of presentation and homiletic ideas are compatible, and on the factors might lead them to diverge from one another. In one sense, the dramatic impersonation of a *moriens* risks reducing the cultivation of the postures of the good death to mere performance. In religious ritual, the repetition of a given sets of postures by different performers over an extended period of time tends to reinforce the efficacy of the ritual and strengthen bonds between members of the religious community carrying out the ritual. By dying well in line with an established pattern, Christians assert their participation in the death of Christ upon which the Church is founded and unite with one another as "partners in mortality."³³ In drama, by contrast, iterating sincere religious postures often seems to evacuate them of meaning, either by rendering them comic or by exposing them as impostures that can easily and repeatedly be assumed by actors who have no sincere attachment to them. Furthermore, the dramatic imitation of the death stands as an emphatic reminder of the limitations of theatrical practices. Nobody actually dies onstage. It is not only possible for actors to imitate dying well in bad faith; it is in fact impossible for them to do so in good faith. In consequence, it is easy to read stage deaths as always, in some way, bad. And certainly, the plays I look at acknowledge these kinds of anti-theatrical critiques when they present

parodic, cynical or despairing approaches to the death frequently performed by characters who possess particularly actorly or metatheatrical sensibilities.

However, it is also possible to reverse the significance of this analogy. Theatrical death becomes an opportunity to theorize dramatic performance as something other than the empty habitation of forms. The perplexing notion that dying might be something that you act as well as something you merely undergo, and the minimal forms of action that are contained within this notion, become powerful analogies for thinking about what actors are doing onstage beyond simply existing and outside of particular instances of representation or presentation. Though resemblances between acting and dying might justify skepticism of performative models of the good death, they might alternatively reveal energies involved in actorly performance that are really like those supposed to be channeled on the Christian deathbed. Certainly, characters in the plays I discuss adopt actorly postures in imitation of the *artes moriendi* not just to deceive those around them as to their true intentions or dispositions or to render the behavior of the godly comic, but also in order to identify the nature and limitations of the agency belonging to the dying and then to attempt to apply this agency to achieve theological, political, social or economic goals. The fraud in *Volpone*, for example, is grounded in the assumption that when the titular character is lying prone on his couch, pointedly avoiding action, he is doing something that can earn him profit. By paying attention to these postures, we can start to develop models of actorly identity and agency based less on the social construction of identity through performative self-fashioning than on the assertion through performance of an underlying identity that is able to perform.

Moreover, though these forms of performance most obviously function as metatheatrical commentary, the uses to which characters put them imply they also might have relevance and potency outside the theater. By tracking interactions between the *artes moriendi* and drama, I aim to show how many postures commonly associated with supposedly secular modernity against a residual theological worldview—including the humanist self-sufficiency exhibited by Faustus, the different models of kingship canvassed in *Richard II*, Volpone's assertion of personal and economic autonomy, and the materialist philosophies imagined within *The Atheist's Tragedy*—are in fact strongly conditioned by the conventions of devotional writings. Looking at the influence of the *artes moriendi* on the Elizabethan and Jacobean commercial theater becomes a way to uncover some of the religious roots underlying modern representations of human action and agency in a variety of political, social and economic contexts.

The four chapters of my dissertation each explore how the presentation of characterological action and agency in a different early modern dramatic work reflects a particular aspect of the *ars moriendi* tradition. In the opening half, I focus primarily on the impact of the Reformation on deathbed culture and its theatrical representation. My first chapter, "*Doctor Faustus* and the Calvinist Art of Dying Badly" asks why Marlowe's Faustus might wish to cultivate a bad death. Contrary to critical traditions that see the play as a monitory drama in an orthodox vein, or as an iconoclastic celebration of humanist ambition, I read *Doctor Faustus* as an investigative response to Calvinist understandings of grace. In a theological system where good action distinct from God is impossible, the bad death becomes an

important site for thinking about human agency and for trying to reconcile belief in irresistible providence with the experience of living in the world. I show how Marlowe adapts conventions from earlier Protestant homiletic tracts and plays to represent Faustus. These works depict dying men who simultaneously recall the particular figure of the reprobate and the universal one of the everyman in order to evoke an absolute prior distinction between the saved and the damned, while also acknowledging the difficulty of recognizing that distinction at work in experience. But the occasion of death reveals a difference between Marlowe and his models. Where earlier plays assert the power of providence as their protagonists die, Marlowe's drama extends uncertainty about the meaning of Faustus's bad end beyond the moment when the devils take him away. Dying badly is both a unique event Faustus suffers when he is dragged to hell on the stroke of midnight, and an indefinitely extended process that he tries to control by obsessively rehearsing different religious and philosophical practices of dying. I show that by refusing to make either perspective primary, Marlowe in a sense strives harder than his homiletic antecedents to imagine what it would mean to integrate Calvinism with the world. Consequently, my reading qualifies accounts of Marlowe as a secular ironist with an interest in debunking religious pieties, and instead uncovers a figure engaged in a serious investigation of how the theological could be reconciled with lived experience.

My second chapter, "Mourner, *Moriens* or Martyr? Mimetic Death as Political Strategy in *Richard II*," attends to differences between Catholic and Protestant *artes moriendi* by focusing on understandings of embodied imitation on the deathbed and

in drama. I begin by analyzing the paradoxical place of saintly martyrs within Catholic understandings of the good death. Martyrs are at once ideal examples of deathbed *Imitatio Christi* and dangerous perversions of it who risk aggrandizing themselves beyond their model or giving way to masochistic and exhibitionist desires that are at odds with orthodox belief. Though their devotees find saints to be helpful mediators (as models and as intercessors) in their quest to die well, they can also appear entirely opposed to the normative framework of *ars moriendi*. Yet avoiding or discounting martyrs does not make imitative dying easier. When martyrs and other saints are theoretically banished from the Protestant deathbed, their absence only means that *morientes* have no choice but to confront directly the problem of how to appropriately imitate the Passion.

Shakespeare's *Richard II* evokes Catholic and Protestant traditions of mimetic dying, embodying the postures of Christ, Judas, martyred saint and suicidal reprobate during his approach to death. By imitating exempla, Richard attempts to manage his political and spiritual existence in such a way as will ensure him a personal, good, Christian end, and will also imply future providential intervention to punish Bullingbrook's usurpation. However, Richard's postures also recall exemplary bad endings, and so hint at his transgressive desire for the wrong sort of death and his failures as a political leader. Within the play, the figure of anamorphosis becomes emblematic of the contradictory positions Richard adopts inside of and awry to his models of dying. These contradictions do not merely reveal Richard's character; they also uncover fundamental tensions between spiritual and worldly understandings of imitation. Moreover, by evoking historically and

doctrinally distinct understandings of the good and bad death, and making use of productive anachronism, Shakespeare also requires the theater audience to occupy divergent, anamorphic perspectives on the action and implicates them in the recreation of politically and spiritually dubious martyr narratives and the adoption of potentially transgressive mimetic practices. Looking at the clashes the play stages between different mimetic models of the good death should encourage us to rethink a line of criticism that, from Walter Pater and E.M. Tillyard onwards, has read *Richard II* as a mournful record of the passing of a medieval or Catholic sensibility. Instead, interactions between past and present are shown to be unstable, characterized as much by unspeakable persistence or unwelcome haunting as by regretful nostalgia. Dying imitatively is sometimes a practice of mourning a lost object of desire, and sometimes an accidental resurrection of what might better stay buried. And Shakespeare implies that the mimetic and mournful relationships we have with the dead help structure our understanding of the past and the political constitution of the present.

In the second half of the dissertation, I turn to Jacobean texts that are less attuned to doctrinal debates than to the relationship between sacred and profane engagements with mortality. In the third chapter, “‘This is Called Mortifying of a Fox:’ *Volpone*, Community Theater, and How to Get Rich Quick by Dying Slowly,” I read Jonson’s comedy about a man who pretends to be terminally ill in order to defraud legacy-hunters. I ask why, of all possible commodities, *Volpone* chooses to sell his own death and suggest that the answer lies in the ways in which social and economic communities assemble around the deathbed. Gatherings of onlookers at

Volpone's couch superficially resemble the traditional deathbed communities supposed to offer comfort and spiritual support to the dying. But in fact, divergent economic interests separate Volpone and his visitors from one another. The fraud exploits confusion about whether naming an heir constitutes the perpetuation of a dynastic identity or merely the transfer of property; Volpone and the legacy hunters all pretend to be interested in the former while actually seeking the latter. Through drawing attention to this ambiguity, the play investigates how natural, biological processes and traditional understandings of interpersonal relations can be refigured as willed actions that entitle their performers to profit. In the process, it uncovers affinities between dying and theatrical playing—less because the *artes moriendi* should be understood as mere performance than because the perplexing notion of a practice of dying offers suggestive analogies for the scarcely observable minimal level of activity that distinguishes acting from being. The court's punishment of Volpone at the end of the play is an acknowledgement of the failure of traditional communities and an attempt to replace them with centralized forms of institutional control that might allow the state to respond to the challenge posed by Volpone's actions, or even to expropriate the profits and forms of power generated by his fraud for its own use. By examining how economic interests affect the communal deathbed, the play reflects the ongoing shift from stable, local communities to larger, impersonal marketplaces as the primary spheres of commercial activity, and explores the social and ethical consequences of this change.

The final chapter, "*The Atheist's Tragedy* and when Good Deaths come to a Bad End" investigates the impact that secular and theatrical appropriations of the

postures of the *artes moriendi* have on the original homiletic texts and their readers' ability to take them seriously. On the level of plot, Tourneur's *Atheist's Tragedy* strives to render the good Christian orientation towards death heroic in a more orthodox fashion than the other texts I have considered. The play stages a direct conflict between the atheist D'Amville, whose disbelief in divine justice and embrace of a purely material philosophy leads him to murder his brother, and his nephew Charlemont, who responds to D'Amville's crimes by doing nothing and waiting for providence to intervene. The superiority of the Christian perspective is strongly affirmed at the end of the play when D'Amville fatally brains himself with his own axe out of shock at the calmness with which Charlemont can confront his own mortality. Viewed in formal terms, then, the play closely resembles the morality plays I discuss in the context of *Faustus*. However, the extremely citational style of *The Atheist's Tragedy* complicates this assessment. The play is stuffed with pastiches of dramatic scenarios, characters and language from other contemporary tragedies, and the overarching moral vision sounds uneasily against echoes of far more ambiguous plays. At the same time, Tourneur consistently highlights temporal and conceptual breaks between onstage deaths that resist narration and the methods of interpretation surviving characters employ to understand and evaluate them. Consequently, the opposition between atheistic and Christian dying becomes embedded in a far more relativistic rhetorical patterning. I see the play as an exploration of what it means to represent dying as an action within a mature dramatic genre. Dying well, for Tourneur risks becoming so contaminated by theatrical conventions that it can scarcely be separated from the staged death scene.

In this way, *The Atheist's Tragedy* completes a circle. It evokes the earliest homiletic dramas of Christian death, but also represents the final stage of a process through which the very portability of arts of dying for understanding political relations, economic activity and the nature of dramatic *mimesis* threatens to destroy the notion of the good death by rendering it hopelessly theatricalized, self-referential and over-determined.

¹ Thomas Becon, *The Sicke Mans Salve* in David William Atkinson, *The English Ars Moriendi* (New York: Peter Lang, 1992), 87-126.

² For a critical introduction to the genre and a selection of representative *ars moriendi* texts see David William Atkinson, *The English Ars Moriendi* (New York: Peter Lang, 1992). For a general historical survey and bibliography of the *artes moriendi* see Mary Catherine O'Connor, *The Art of Dying Well: the Development of the Ars Moriendi* (Columbia UP: New York, 1942). For a literary and psychological analysis of representative examples in English see Nancy Lee Beaty, *The Craft of Dying: a Study of the Literary Tradition of the Ars Moriendi in England*, (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1970). Other important critical accounts of late medieval and early modern death culture more broadly include David E. Stannard, *The Puritan Way of Death: A Study in Religion, Culture and Social Change*, (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1977); Philippe Aires, *The Hour of Our Death*, trans. Helen Weaver (New York: Knopf, 1981); Eamon Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars: Traditional Religion in England c.1400-c.1580*, (New Haven: Yale UP, 1992); Robert N. Watson, *The Rest is Silence: Death as Annihilation in the English Renaissance*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994); David Cressy, *Birth, Marriage, and Death: Ritual, Religion and the Life Cycle in Tudor and Stuart England* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1997); Michael Neill, *The Issues of Death: Mortality and Identity in English Renaissance Tragedy* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1997); Ralph Houlbrooke, *Death, Religion, and the Family in England, 1480-1750* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998); William E. Engel, *Death and Drama in Renaissance England: Shades of Memory*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002); Peter Marshall, *Beliefs and the Dead in Reformation England*, (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2002); Susan Zimmerman, *The Early Modern Corpse and Shakespeare's Theatre* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2005).

³ For discussions of continuity and change between Catholic and Protestant *artes moriendi* see O'Connor; Duffy; Aires; Atkinson; M.A. Overell, "The Reformation of Death in Italy and England, circa 1550," *Renaissance and Reformation/Renaissance et Reforme*, 23, no. 4 (1999): 5-21; Austra Reinis, *Reforming the Art of Dying: the ars moriendi in the German Reformation (1519-1528)* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2007).

⁴ I copy Beaty in using *moriens* to label the figure of the dying individual within the *artes moriendi*. Also, following the practice of the original homiletic writers, I have used the male pronoun to describe this figure throughout. This is not to deny that women were also expected to die well, or that they could be readers and practitioners of the arts of dying. Jeremy Taylor, for example, dedicates *Holy Dying* to Richard Vaughan in the wake of the death of his original patron, Vaughan's wife, saying "this book was intended first to minister to her piety; and she desired all good people should partake of the advantages which are here recorded: she knew how to live rarely well, and she desired to know how to dye; and God taught her by an experiment." See Jeremy Taylor, *Holy Dying* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), 5.

⁵ For example, the anonymous *Crafte and Knowledge For to Dye Well* (like virtually all subsequent texts) advises that spiritual advisors should “interrogate” the *moriens* on his articles of faith. However, it provides advice on how to proceed if the *moriens* is not able to speak: “yeff the sekeman haue lost his speche, but yet he hath full and olde knowlege off the interrogacions that be made to hym, or the prayers that be rehersed before hym than withowte som other sygne or only with consente of herte, late hym answere therto.” See *Crafte and Knowledge For to Dye Well* in *The English Ars Moriendi*, ed. Atkinson, 15.

⁶ The impossibility of good human action and the absolute necessity of grace are of course universal conditions of predestinarian belief in no way confined to the deathbed. However, preparation for death exemplifies the difficulties of living a Calvinist theology particularly starkly both because of the role deathbed behavior has in revealing whether someone has always in fact been predestined to be damned or saved, and because the inability of a person to control the circumstances of his or her death is frequently treated as an emblem of human powerlessness more generally. On how the end of life emphasizes the conceptual and temporal paradoxes of Calvinism, see A.D. Nuttall, *The Alternative Trinity: Gnostic Heresy in Marlowe, Milton and Blake* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2007), 33-34.

⁷ “The increasingly strident assertions of Christian confidence that mark the orthodox teaching of the *ars moriendi* in this period can themselves be regarded as evidence of the erosion of ancient certainties... Tragedy itself is among the most important cultural expressions of this secularizing process: to appreciate the power of the representations through which it helped to reinvent the experience of death, we need to look not at the mechanisms that were designed to keep death in its place, but at those which attempted to assign it a new one” (Neill, 48). See also Watson, *passim*.

⁸ For discussions of the appearance of the formal features of *ars moriendi* in literature, see Beach Langston, “Marlowe's Faustus and the Ars Moriendi Tradition,” *Tribute to G.C. Taylor* (1952): 148-67; Bettie Anne Doebler, “Othello's Angels: The Ars Moriendi,” *ELH*, 34, no. 2 (1967): 156-172; Donald F. Duclow, “Everyman and the Ars Moriendi: Fifteenth-Century Ceremonies of Dying,” *Fifteenth-Century Studies*, 6 (1983): 93-113; Phoebe Spinrad, “The Last Temptation of Everyman,” *Philological Quarterly*, 64, no. 2 (1985): 185-94. For the argument that *ars moriendi* is mere performance, see Dennis Kezar, *Guilty Creatures: Renaissance Poetry and the Ethics of Authorship* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2001), 139-72.

⁹ Deborah Kuller Shugar, *Habits of Thought in the English Renaissance: Religion, Politics and the Dominant Culture* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), 14-15.

¹⁰ See Shugar, *passim*; Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007), 61-89.

¹¹ For instance, see Jeffrey Knapp, *Shakespeare's Tribe: Church, Nation and Theater in Renaissance England* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002); David Womersley, *Divinity and State*, (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2010); Ken Jackson and Arthur F. Marotti, eds., *Shakespeare and Religion: Early Modern and Postmodern Perspectives* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2011).

¹² O'Connor suggests that it was produced by order of the Council of Constance between 1414 and 1415, 56.

¹³ O'Connor, 2.

¹⁴ O'Connor, 191.

¹⁵ O'Connor, 214.

¹⁶ Martin Luther, "A Sermon on Preparing to Die, 1519," in *Luther's Works*, ed. Martin O. Dietrich, (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1969) Vol. 42, 95-116; William Perkins, *A Salve for a Sicke Man, The English Ars Moriendi*, ed. David William Atkinson, 142-44; Jeremy Taylor, 9-13.

¹⁷ Petrus Luccensis, *A Dialogue of Dying Well, The English Ars Moriendi*, ed. Atkinson; Robert Bellarmine, *Art of Dying Well*, ed. D. M. Rogers (Ilkley: Scholar Press, 1976).

¹⁸ *Evangelish lere und vermanung eines sterbende(n) menschen zu(o) den sacramenten un(d) letzte(r) hinfart* ([Leipzig:] Wolfgang Sto(e)ckel, 1552), translated and discussed in Reinis 143-59.

¹⁹ Desiderius Erasmus, "Preparatione for Deathe" in *The English Ars Moriendi*, ed. Atkinson, 61. The same parable appears in Bellarmine, 260.

²⁰ See Reinis, 152-55.

²¹ In particular, see Matteo Gribaldi, *A notable and marueilous epistle of the famous doctour, Matthewe Gribalde, Professor of the lawe, in the Vniuersitie of Padua: co[n]cernyng the terrible iudgemente of God, vpon hym that for feare of men, denieth Christ and the knowne veritie: with a preface of Doctor Caluine* (London: 1570). The Spiera texts are discussed in Overell.

²² Thomas Lupset, *The Waye of Dyenge Well* in Atkinson, 69-86. See especially the account of Canius's approach to death 70-71.

²³ Perkins, 147.

²⁴ Perkins, 152.

²⁵ For example, "That phisick may be wel applied to the maintenance of health, speciall care must bee had to make choise of such physitions as are knowne to be well learned, and men of experience, as also of good conscience and good religion. For, as in other callings, so in this also, there be sundry abuses which may endanger the lives and the health of men. Some venter upon the bare inspection of the urine without further direction or knowledge of the estate of the sicke to prescribe and minister as shall seeme best unto them. But the learned in this facultie doe plainly avouch that this kinde of dealing tends rather to kill then to cure, and that sundry men are indeede killed thereby for iudgment by the vrine is most deceitfull." Perkins, 151.

²⁶ Charles I, *Eikón basiliké. The pourtracture of His sacred Majestie in his solitudes and sufferings, with a perfect copy of prayers used by His Majesty in the time of his sufferings. Delivered to Dr. Juxon, Bishop of London, immediately before his death.* (London: 1649). For analysis of the text in relation to the arts of dying, see Kezar; Laura L. Knoppers, "Imagining the Death of the King: Milton, Charles I, and Anamorphic Art," in *Imagining Death in Spenser and Milton*, ed. Elizabeth Jane Bellamy, Patrick Cheney and Michael Schoenfeldt (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003).

²⁷ John Milton, *Eikonoklastes in answer to a book intitl'd Eikon basilike, the portrature of his Sacred Majesty in his solitudes and sufferings* (London: 1649).

²⁸ The literature on secularization is extensive and I can do no more here than briefly indicate some of the most influential theories. Max Weber finds an origin point for secular capitalist modernity in Protestant doctrine, which encourages believers in habits at work that lead to the accumulation of capital. However, as this Protestant work ethic results in the ever-greater acquisition of material possessions, it becomes increasingly incompatible with sincere religious belief. Notions of calling become disenchanting until all that is left is the "shell" of Christian asceticism without the "spirit." See Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the "Spirit" of Capitalism*, trans. Peter Baehr and Gordon C. Wells (London: Penguin, 2002). Carl Schmitt follows Weber in constructing a narrative of disenchantment,

but focuses on national political institutions rather than local economic formations, and on the vacuum left by the sidelining of the universal church rather than the injection of new modes of religious practice and belief. For him, “All significant concepts of the modern theory of the state are secularized theological concepts not only because of their historical development—in which they were transferred from theology to the theory of the state, whereby, for example, the omnipotent God became the omnipotent lawgiver—but also because of their systematic structure, the recognition of which is necessary for sociological consideration of these concepts,” Carl Schmitt, *Political Theology*, trans. George Schwab (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1985), 36. Hans Blumenberg resists Schmitt on the grounds that his account delegitimizes modernity and argues for secularization to be understood descriptively rather than in explanatory terms. Hans Blumenberg, *The Legitimacy of the Modern Age*, trans. Robert M. Wallace (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1983). For a recent survey of the field and essays rethinking secularization, see *Representations*, 105, no. 1 (2009).

²⁹ Charles Taylor, 3.

³⁰ For Taylor himself, the most interesting question is how these religious and non-religious discourse enable humans to experience different degrees of what he terms “fullness” or “flourishing.” What is at stake is whether fulfillment or links to the transcendent (which Taylor sees as intimately interlinked) are sustainable in a secular age in either religious or non-religious terms. Much criticism of Taylor has centered whether the book is in fact simply Christian apologia. For a range of intelligent responses to his project, see Michael Warner, Jonathan VanAntwerpen and Craig Calhoun, eds., *Varieties of Secularism in a Secular Age* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 2010).

³¹ The text appears under the following title: *Here begynneth a treatyse how ye hye fader of heuen sendeth dethe to somon euery creature to come and gyue a counte of theyr lyues in this worlde and is in maner of a morall playe* (London: 1528).

³² For accounts of Puritan anti-theatricality see Jonas Barish, *The Anti-Theatrical Prejudice* (London: U of California P, 1981); Peter Lake and Michael Questier, *The Antichrist’s Lewd Hat: Protestants, Papists and Players in Post-Reformation England* (New Haven: Yale UP, 2002).

³³ The phrase is from Augustine, *Confessions*, trans. William Watts, ed. W. H. D. Rouse, Loeb Classical Library 27 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1912), X.6.

DOCTOR FAUSTUS AND THE CALVINIST ART OF DYING BADLY

“Faustus is gone, regard his hellish fall,” the Chorus advises the audience in the epilogue to *Doctor Faustus*.¹ The words imply that this “hellish fall” sums up the action of the play as a whole, that Faustus’s end constitutes a definitive statement of, or an extractable moral commentary on, what has gone before. In part, this speech simply reflects the centrality to the Faust legend of the magician’s death at the hands of the devils as a deserved punishment for his misdeeds. The Chorus, in keeping with established homiletic conventions, insists on the inevitability of an appropriately miserable finish to Faustus’s wicked life, and simultaneously stresses the monitory value of his example. I suggest, though, that the emphasis the Chorus places on Faustus’s end also reflects ways in which exemplary deaths of this sort had come to represent artistic and theological problems for Marlowe and his contemporaries, and that it is as an attempt to wrestle with these problems that Faustus’s death is particularly worth regarding. There are reasons why Faustus may have to die badly, but there are also important questions about the proper form his death should take and about how it should be assessed.

In depicting Faustus’s end, Marlowe is drawing upon a literary tradition of representing and evaluating deaths that was well established, yet also increasingly under attack. From the late fifteenth century onwards, numerous *ars moriendi* guides modeling appropriate Christian deathbed behavior were published across

Europe. The *ars moriendi* genre found a dramatic analogue in morality plays that represented onstage either good deaths to be emulated or bad deaths to be avoided. However, dramatic exemplars of this sort had become difficult to sustain by the time of *Faustus's* composition. Although Protestant arts of dying certainly did exist, Calvinist accounts of predestination threatened to undermine the whole tradition of *ars moriendi* by implying that a meaningful art of dying was impossible, since an individual could have no relation to his or her death that was not purely passive.² Additionally, by the 1580's, the theater in particular was starting to look like a poor medium for exploring questions of this nature, as Protestant thinkers increasingly characterized the stage as inherently immoral. In this context, there were reasons to be suspicious of any claim that an onstage death could be made to serve a homiletic purpose.

There is consequently something anachronistic about Marlowe's creation of a homiletic drama of dying. He appropriates a mode of writing that had already been largely abandoned by its practitioners as unsuccessful. Perhaps as a result, the exploration of dying badly in *Doctor Faustus* is accompanied by an exploration of what it means to *represent* dying badly, and of whether a representation of a bad death must itself also be somehow ethically or aesthetically bad. Attempts in the play to characterize Faustus's death are frequently accompanied by images of failure and of impasse. Yet to say that Faustus's death is *associated with* artistic and theological failure is not necessarily to say that it *is*, simply, failed. Since most Calvinist interpretations of grace focus particularly on denying any active human participation in good behavior, the bad death becomes an important site for

understanding human action.³ If human activity distinct from God is irredeemably vicious, then the best place to explore the scope of that activity will be vicious action. In investigating how a Calvinist art of dying could proceed, Marlowe suggests it might only be viable, perversely, as a Calvinist art of dying *badly*. *Faustus* asks what value there might be in failed performances of dying.

To characterize what is at stake in Marlowe's artistic project, I first look at some of the Homiletic Tragedies of the 1570's and 80's, which adapt the conventions of earlier morality plays to create overtly Calvinist dramas of reprobation. I argue that the authors of these works exploit seeming incompatibilities between the established morality drama of the everyman and an emergent view of an essential distinction between the elect and the damned. They use the problematic coincidence of the figures of the everyman and the reprobate as a means simultaneously to represent an embedded, human perspective and an incomprehensible, metaphysical one. In doing this, they affirm a fundamentally orthodox Protestant theology in which damnation is predetermined, while also acknowledging the immanent experience of a human subject from whose vantage point this metaphysical structure is invisible.

I then turn to Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus* and suggest that the play inherits many of the Homiletic Tragedies' most interesting structural features, but that it pays more attention to the, admittedly limited, possibilities for human action in a Calvinist context, and so makes any hierarchical overwriting of human experience by a religious order at the end of the play difficult. Dramatizations of the deathbed in the Homiletic Tragedies mark human perspectives as inferior to a transcendent

heavenly order. By contrast, Marlowe defers and de-emphasizes any such resolution in *Faustus* by dramatically extending Faustus's experience of death. Prolonging the experience of dying complicates the model of the Homiletic Tragedies. Instead of conclusively affirming a divinely sanctioned economy that has always governed Faustus's actions and experiences, the play offers up a succession of inconclusive, competing revelations. Even when Faustus's "hellish fall" finally arrives, Marlowe's play strives to do justice to the reprobate's experience, and to identify strategies through which Faustus can act even as he suffers death and damnation. The most significant of these are extended performances of dying badly, during which Faustus acts in and through his own failure.

Bad endings pervade *Faustus* in a way that figures Faustus's problem of practicing an art of dying in a Protestant context, where the only scope for human action apart from God is viciousness, as having a more general import. Faustus's bad spiritual end is only the most obvious sense in which the play ends badly. His vacillating, despairing behavior in the final scene also fails to live up to any model identifiable from the orthodox *ars moriendi* tradition – or, indeed, to any non-Christian practice of dying. This, though, is not presented solely as Faustus's failure. The social, spiritual and theatrical institutions that might be expected to support him in achieving a good death are shown to be notably weak and ineffective. At the same time, an aesthetic of bad endings becomes increasingly noticeable in the final act, as Faustus's own sense of the inadequacy of different ways of approaching his own end is increasingly mirrored in the structure of the play.

In *Doctor Faustus*, Marlowe engages with the *ars moriendi* tradition, not to write an orthodox or an iconoclastic play as such, but to take orthodoxy seriously by dramatizing the difficulty inherent in sustaining Protestant models of the art of dying. Faustus's fate conforms to inherited patterns by pointing to a transcendent theological worldview. But Marlowe does not let this worldview subsume the reprobate's experience in any uncomplicated way, as the Homiletic Tragedies typically did. Marlowe stops short of endorsing Faustus's pact with the devil and his performance of damnation, but he does give it its due as a symptom of the intractable problem of creating an art of dying in a Calvinist context. The importance that bad endings assume in *Faustus* suggests that the problem is a systemic one, inherent both to Calvinist *artes moriendi* and to dramatic forms that developed alongside them. Ultimately, a substantive, sustainable Protestant art of dying that is not bound up with failure exists only as an impossible aspiration to be gestured toward beyond the performance of the play.

By focusing on the affinities between *Doctor Faustus* and Protestant understandings of *ars moriendi*, with particular reference to bad deaths, I hope, first, to encourage greater appreciation of the sophistication of the Homiletic Tragedies in repurposing older dramatic forms to reflect representational problems occasioned by Calvinism. Second, in my reading of *Doctor Faustus*, I show that one way to move beyond debates about whether Marlowe's play is orthodox or heterodox is to see it as a play *about* Calvinist orthodoxy, which does not itself take an easily definable theological stance.⁴ Finally, I suggest that considering approaches to dying derived from *ars moriendi* texts in relation to Elizabethan theater could generate new ways

to theorize performance. If Faustus's performance of dying badly implies a need for criteria other than moral efficacy or aesthetic execution for assessing action, this could have implications for how we understand dramatic activity more generally.

I.

In *From Mankind to Marlowe*, David Bevington suggests that morality plays of the 1560's, 70's and 80's develop away from their medieval antecedents to depict more individuated figures, but remain structurally and thematically similar to earlier plays. Alongside this development, he identifies an emerging class of plays he labels "Homiletic Tragedies." While medieval moralities uniformly ended hopefully, with the central figure newly convinced of the importance of Christian virtue, the influence of predestinarian doctrine on the Tudor theater resulted in "a shift in the balance from forgiveness to retribution" and "made possible a drama of an amusing and yet devastating spiritual degeneration."⁵ Bevington stresses continuity between earlier and later moralities, arguing that episodes of moral degeneracy common in the earlier *Psychomachia* tradition supply "the materials for a tragic resolution," so that all that is necessary to turn a comedy into a tragedy is "terminating its usual progression of spiritual downfall and recovery before the final phase."⁶ I claim instead that a Calvinist context fundamentally changes the relationship between the protagonist's character and a tragic dénouement in a way that sits very oddly with inherited dramatic forms. Consequently, even when earlier and later plays share formal features, the significance these features have can be very different. In particular, the later plays bring together the tradition of a morally malleable everyman, whose spiritual postures are determined by encounters he makes in the

world, and the emergent notion of the morally powerless reprobate, whose only important spiritual relation (or lack thereof) is with God. Although the protagonists of the plays are shown as deservedly and inevitably suffering damnation, their behavior at times also approaches strikingly close to appropriate godly behavior. This dimension of their presentation enables a more complex examination of the pulls towards godliness and wickedness, which are shown as difficult to distinguish. Additionally, the very poor fit between the models of the reprobate and the everyman generates a sense of characters being simultaneously acted upon at different levels, in different manners and by different agents, and a more explicit theorization of what it means for characters to act themselves.

William Wager's *Enough is as Good as a Feast* (1571) dramatizes the history of Worldly Man, whose fate is contested by a group of virtuous characters, led by Heavenly Man and Enough and urging moderation, and a group of vices, led by Covetousness and urging the pursuit of wealth.⁷ Although briefly attracted to moderation near the beginning of the play, Worldly Man ultimately throws his lot in with Covetousness, and with his help is shown squeezing a tenant and cheating a hireling. As Worldly Man conspires to turn out the tenant so that he can turn his house into a buttery, a Prophet enters to warn him of the fate of hypocrites. Almost immediately, Worldly Man falls sick, and God's Plague enters to confirm that he is the cause of the sickness. Worldly Man is ministered to by Covetousness, along with an ineffective priest called Ignorance, and a Physician who confirms to him that he is dying. On his deathbed, he makes verbal orders for the provision for his wife and goods, and attempts to dictate a will, but falls down dead unable to finish speaking

the opening sentence “In the name...” (1401). The play ends with Satan entering to claim him.

What interests me about *Enough* is the extent to which it takes the dramatization of Worldly Man’s motions towards repentance seriously. Worldly Man may well always have been a reprobate, but he doesn’t always look as though he is. When he is first brought under the influence of Enough, there is evidence that his embrace of moderation is sincere:

But thanks be to God the father of all might,
Which will not the death of sinners as Scripture doth say,
It hath pleased him to open unto me the true light
Whereby I perceive the right path from the broad way;
Therefore, I am content myself for to stay
With Enough which bringeth me to quiet in body and mind;
Yea, and all other commodities therewith I do find. (658-64)

Worldly Man’s theology sounds orthodox here. He correctly apprehends his situation and what his behavior should be. Moreover, he states he is “content” – that is, that he has an internal, affective acceptance – with what Enough brings him. His claim that God has “open[ed] unto me the true light” stresses grace rather than human agency, and also implies a real, felt change in position and perspective. There are, admittedly, ironies in Wager’s presentation of Worldly Man as virtuous.

Heavenly Man persuades Worldly Man to be content with enough by talking about the “treasures most excellent” of heaven (263), raising the possibility that he never understands Godly rewards except by analogy to material ones;⁸ Enough and

Worldly Man's discussion of the fate of the covetous prefigures his eventual fall; and the speed with which Worldly Man is corrupted by Covetousness argues against the sincerity of his conversion. But the point that I wish to stress is that in the moment of a virtuous impulse, there is nothing in appearance or language to distinguish an ultimately reprobate character such as Worldly Man from a genuinely virtuous character.

Worldly Man's appearance on his deathbed represents an importantly contrasting way in which the reprobate and the elect can converge. To show his lack of repentance, Wager has Worldly Man exhibit perverted and parodic forms of correct godly behavior. Like any *moriens* in the art of dying tradition, he is surrounded by a community of friends and advisors. However, most of them are vices; only the Physician shows even a formulaic concern for his spiritual well being. Also like any *moriens*, Worldly Man in the final scenes is concerned with setting his affairs in order before death. However, he conceives of these affairs in an entirely worldly sense, understanding his poor health as a medical rather than a spiritual fact, and spending his last moments dictating a will rather than caring for his soul.

Worldly Man's will is a particularly striking marker of the dynamic that I am interested in because it signifies his continued concern for his worldly possessions, but also demonstrates how close his position necessarily approaches to a godly one. Early modern wills generally had dual religious and economic functions, and wills containing surprisingly specific economic stipulations show up even in spiritual *ars moriendi* texts.⁹ Worldly Man, of course, is concerned solely with the economic dimension of his will and with helping his wife to "(as near as she can)

forgo nought,” to the detriment of his creditors (1392). There is no indication that he sees the opening formula “in the name of God” as anything more than a conventional preamble. Yet the fact that Worldly Man needs to say God’s name, if only formulaically, shows how closely godly and ungodly behavior converge on the deathbed. Conversely, Epaphroditus the *moriens* in Thomas Becon’s homiletic “A Sick Man’s Salve,” if only for the sake of giving his will some content, has to specify the particular amount of money (forty pounds) he is bequeathing for the upkeep of public highways.¹⁰ The godly and the reprobate invest different elements of the process of making a will with real, and with purely conventional or accidental, significance. Deathbed postures and practices become overdetermined so that there is a residuum of the world at the godliest deathbed and a residuum of religion at the most spiritually bankrupt.

Enough is as Good as a Feast ultimately swerves away from the apparent convergence of godly and reprobate behavior in will making to affirm a clear hierarchy between them. Worldly Man is prevented from using a spiritual formula simply *as* a formula when he is physically unable to name God. This failure is an explicit sign of his reprobate status, shortly confirmed by the appearance of Satan. The worldly deathbed is conclusively marked as a failed, derivative performance of the godly death; the apparent similarity is significant only because it reveals a far more real divergence.

This second type of convergence, where the worldly bears a parodic relation to the godly, overwrites the first type, where the reprobate momentarily displays sincere godly impulses. Elements that are separated sequentially in the earlier part

of the play (so that Worldly Man is wicked, then good, then wicked again) are here compressed (so that wickedness and goodness simultaneously attach to the same postures and become available to the audience together) in a way that increases the dramatic charge of this scene in comparison to the earlier ones. That Worldly Man's death, in particular, becomes a site of this second type of convergence is significant in marking this moment, and the hierarchical relationship between heaven and earth it implies, as definitive. The experience of death ruptures the episodic chronology of the earlier part of the play, which had been characterized by sequential alteration of good and bad behavior, and replaces it with a totalizing assessment of Worldly Man's life as a whole. Wager associates the hierarchical arrangement of godly and worldly with an eschatological perspective against an embedded, earthly one. This shift in how the final scenes of the play evoke godly behavior can also be seen in dramatic terms as a move from a form of drama that owes a lot to the earlier morality plays in its presentation of a highly suggestible and changeable protagonist, to a drama drawing on a more obviously Protestant understanding of character, in which both godly and reprobate statuses are essentially ingrained. The play in a sense dramatizes the supersession of the old everyman figure. But the fact that Wager overwrites the earlier appearances of good impulses in Worldly Man in such an emphatic way suggests anxiety about the existence of virtuous impulses in a reprobate character, and about the ways in which they complicate a Calvinist drama.

Nathaniel Woodes' *Conflict of Conscience* (1581) dramatizes a similar reprobate central figure, who again approaches strikingly close to godliness, initially

inhabiting a godly role sincerely before ending in a parody of godliness.¹¹ Woodes' protagonist Philologus is a Protestant who is convinced to convert to Catholicism by a vision of worldly joys. After a brief period of pleasure, during which he rejects Conscience's calls to renew his faith, he is abruptly arrested by Horror, and informed that he has "extinguished the holy Spirit of God" (1977), so that grace is no longer available to him. Immediately, he falls into despair. Friends and family members gather round him and attempt to console him, in particular by urging him to pray with them. He speaks the words of prayers, but insists that they are ineffective because they are not matched by any inner feeling since "all grace [is] gone" (2220). Philologus leaves his friends, still unconsolated, and in the final scene a messenger appears to announce that he has hanged himself.

Conflict is similar to *Enough* in its use of a psychomachic structure to depict a reprobate character, and in its retention of aspects of the everyman figure to make evident the resemblances between the behavior of the potentially saved and of the inevitably damned. In fact, it goes further than *Enough* in dramatizing this closeness.¹² The godly Philologus of the first half of the play performs his part more successfully, for longer, and with less prompting than the briefly reformed Worldly Man does. And while Worldly Man could not name God on his deathbed, Philologus names him repeatedly, and can perform acts of prayer well enough to convince his auditors that he is actually praying. As in *Enough*, though, Philologus' near approach to godliness in his final scene is always distinct enough from actual godliness for the audience to remain certain of his Philologus' ultimate fate; Philologus makes the

point that he is without grace repeatedly, and his assessment is ratified by the pronouncements of Horror.

Woodes and Wager both create protagonists resembling everyman figures and then place them in Calvinist contexts, even though the notion of a Calvinist everyman is, strictly, impossible. I think, though, that this is not a naïve dramatic decision. The very poor fit between inherited dramatic models and Calvinism can be dramatically advantageous, for several reasons. First, the ability of characters like Worldly Man and Philologus to mimic a godly perspective perfectly, and apparently sincerely, points to an important epistemological difficulty inherent to Calvinism. The plays dramatize how similar godly and vicious individuals can appear, even to themselves. In doing so, they capture the way in which the absolute difference between the saved and the damned is obscured by the difficulty of knowing who is what, and the experience of uncertainty that results from this obscurity. Second, the shift I have noted in the two plays, between episodes where the protagonists more nearly approach the morally malleable nature of a medieval everyman, and episodes where their reprobate status is enforced by a hierarchical relationship in which the worldly is shown to be trumped by the godly, reflects a felt disjunction between the experience of living in the world, and a metaphysical perspective in which human action is determined – a disjunction that shows up most starkly at death.

II.

One difference in emphasis between the Homiletic Tragedies I have just discussed and *Doctor Faustus* is the much greater extent to which Marlowe's play

consistently and explicitly flags Faustus's reprobate status from the beginning. Characters occupying positions across the entire moral continuum of the play, from the Old Man through to the devils, repeatedly observe that Faustus deserves to go to hell. The most emphatic articulation of a theology that necessitates this damnation comes from the Chorus. In the prologue, religious, classical and material registers of expression and understandings of causation are made to work in tandem to reinforce the necessity of Faustus's fall and the religious framework that determines it, so that there is no discursive position from which another interpretation of the action can be articulated. The Chorus introduces Faustus by telling the audience that he delighted in theology:

Till swollen with cunning of a self-conceit,

His waxen wings did mount above his reach

And melting heavens conspir'd his overthrow. (Prologue, 20-23)

The homiletic principle that Faustus must be punished for pride in his own abilities is expressed through the classical image of Icarus' fall, and Icarus' fate is itself accounted for in scientific terms. The word "conspir'd" carries a secondary meaning of breathed together, and consequently suggests a mechanistic description of the action of the sun on wax as well as deterministic heavenly plotting to bring about Faustus's destruction. Classical example and the observable properties of the material universe align with the Christian interpretation of Faustus's fate in which heavenly power determines his overthrow. In this moment, the Chorus offers no perspective that does not necessitate damnation.

The Chorus's epilogue reaffirms the bad death of Faustus, and, like the prologue, uses classical and natural imagery in order to do so:

Cut is the branch that might have grown full straight,
And burned is Apollo's laurel bough
That sometime grew within this learned man:
Faustus is gone, regard his hellish fall,
Whose fiendful fortune may exhort the wise
Only to wonder at unlawful things,
Whose deepness doth entice such forward wits
To practice more than heavenly power permits. (Epilogue 1-8)

Even more than the prologue, the epilogue insists on the absolute fact of Faustus's bad end, here emphasized by repetition. Again, the Chorus evokes a natural world order (represented by the organic propensity of a branch to grow straight) and a classical one (under the supervision of Apollo) to confirm Faustus's damnation. The configuration, though, is different from that seen in the prologue; instead of being aligned and leading to the same conclusion as a theological worldview, here non-religious discourses are placed in a hierarchically inferior position and superseded by religious ones, reflecting an association that has developed between scientific inquiry, classical literature and the demonic over the course of the play.¹³ The bough is cut and Apollo's branch is burned, both made subordinate to heavenly power in a manner that evokes the institution of a divine hierarchy at the end of *Enough* and *Conflict*.

Yet while the inevitability and justice of Faustus's damnation is asserted with force, there is a significant lacuna in the religious framework of *Faustus*, which separates it from the Homiletic Tragedies. The play renders Satan and hell explicitly and immediately, while God and heaven are largely absent. The audience sees Lucifer, and the B-text even contains stage directions calling for the discovery of hell. By contrast, the actions and influence of God, Christ and other heavenly powers are only ever reported as emblematic visions that the audience does not share.¹⁴ The most sustained of these appeals to the heavenly are found in the Old Man's speeches to Faustus, and in Faustus's evocation of Christ during his final soliloquy. These are both clear allusions to grace, and therefore both present heaven where it directly influences human experience. We might consequently expect this to be where heaven would be at its most accessible to representation. But in various ways, the two speeches put God and His mercy at a distance.

The Old Man tries to call Faustus to repentance by saying:

I see an angel hovers o'er thy head,

And with a vial full of precious grace

Offers to pour the same into thy soul:

Then call for mercy and avoid despair. (5.1.53-56)

The Old Man's declaration that he "sees" the angel emphasizes that *we* do *not* see it, in stark contrast to staged diabolical emblems such as the pageant of the seven deadly sins. Moreover, even on its own terms, the image asserts no more than a potential contact with the divine, since the claim that the angel "offers to pour" puts emphasis on the distance between the theoretical availability of grace and its actual

manifestation. It is not clear whether what the Old Man is seeing is an interrupted, but realizable, ministration of grace, or whether a gesture of offering is the most that Faustus can hope for. A representational problem and a theological problem are made to coincide, since another way to phrase the difficulty raised by the Old Man's angel would be to see it as a question of the extent to which a performance of the offering of grace correlates to an actual, efficacious dispensation of grace.

The same distancing can be seen in Faustus's final references to Christ, where he asks the audience to

See, see where Christ's blood streams in the firmament:

One drop would save my soul, half a drop! Ah, my Christ,

Ah rend not my heart for naming of my Christ,

Yet will I call on him, oh spare me Lucifer! (5.2.71-4)

Again, there is a call to "see" an unstaged emblem, and again the mechanism of grace is arrested. Faustus's image reconfigures the Old Man's by replacing an offered pouring with a stream of blood that never reaches the earth. It suggests that even if the Old Man's vision were fulfilled in its own terms it would still be insufficient to reach Faustus. Faustus's demand the audience "see" Christ is swiftly recharacterized as an act of "naming" so that, again, a theological problem merges with a representational one, as Faustus' inability to achieve salvation is reconfigured as an inability to sustain an image of salvation as more than a purely linguistic evocation. And Christ disappears completely when Faustus's apostrophe to him changes into an apostrophe to Lucifer.

More generally, sacramental imagery functions in *Faustus* to distance God and grace as real possibilities in the play. As C. L. Barber observes, allusions to the sacramental are everywhere.¹⁵ In particular, Faustus's signing of his soul over to Lucifer functions as a parody of Christ's sacrifice and of the sacrament as a symbol of that sacrifice. As noted above, the Homiletic Tragedies provide a precedent for a reprobate protagonist parodically inhabiting godly postures. Unlike the Homiletic Tragedies, though, *Faustus* introduces a parodic sacrament long before orthodox versions appear. This means that watching *Faustus*, the audience encounters Faustus's offer of blood as part of his pact with the devil as original and immediate, and later, more conventional, images of the sacrament as parodic revisions. Death and damnation are uncontested inevitabilities, affirmed by the very structure of the play; the devil is on stage; but God is at a distance, viewable only at a secondary remove in derivative terms, and spoken about in language emphasizing the distorting effects of human perception.

Considering this situation, it is unsurprising that responding to Faustus's anticipated death, and finding a way to reconcile it with Faustus's experience of life from an embedded perspective, assumes so much importance in the play. In the homiletic tradition, a protagonist's bad death functions as a conclusive assertion of the relation between heaven, hell and the world, in which a human perspective is revealed as subordinate to a heavenly one. Because the heavenly is almost invisible in *Faustus*, however, questions about what exactly Faustus's death means, and who can determine its meaning, become particularly urgent.

A concern with understanding and controlling Faustus's end is evident from the opening soliloquy. As Edward A. Snow demonstrates, Faustus's survey and rejection of a succession of academic fields of study is organized around shifting understandings of endings, and is marked in particular by Faustus's tendency to equate other senses of ending with "an eschatological, self-alienating sense of 'end-point' or 'termination.'"¹⁶ Faustus wants a professional identity that will provide him with a defined and recognizable way of living. At the same time, his fixation on termini also figures each possible identity as a means of dying. Faustus's turn to magic and pact with the devil arise from this vein of inquiry and continue the same pattern. In a notable departure from Marlowe's source, the *English Faustbook*, Faustus suggests a limited term of twenty-four years for the bargain without any prompting from Mephastophilis, so implying that a stipulated endpoint might be part of what he wants, rather than merely an unfortunate consequence of dealing with the devil.¹⁷

The precise form that Faustus's agreement takes – the Deed of Gift – has a particularly close association with death, and analyzing it helps to articulate how exactly Faustus might be inhabiting conventional notions of dying. Early modern English gift-law followed Roman law in distinguishing between gifts *inter vivos* and gifts *mortis causa* (on account of death). Gifts *inter vivos* were enforceable only if they took effect immediately. If I give you my soul in the instant, I will not legally be allowed to reclaim it if I change my mind, but a promise to give you my soul next Monday will have no legal force. By contrast, gifts *mortis causa* could be made

prospectively. Justinian, to whom Faustus has already referred explicitly in his opening soliloquy, defines gifts of this second type by saying:

A gift in contemplation of death is one where the donor anticipates dying. He gives the thing on the understanding that if he passes away the donee shall keep it, but if he survives, and equally if he changes his mind or the donee dies first, he shall have it back. (*Mortis causa donatio est, quae propter mortis fit suspicionem, cum quis ita donat, ut si quid humanitus ei contigisset, haberet is qui accepit: sin autem supervixisset qui donavit, reciperet, vel si eum donationis paenituisset aut prior decesserit is cui donatum sit*).¹⁸

In this case, though property may be handed over, the gift only takes full effect in the future – when the giver dies. Gifts *mortis causa* are understood as a special subsection of testamentary law. Though the paradigmatic situation when this kind of gift is appropriate is one of imminent physical danger (the example Justinus gives is of Telemachus' gift to Piraeus before returning to his father's palace in the *Odyssey*), there is no evidence that the "prospect of death" needs to be immediate for the gift to be valid.

How enforceable Faustus's gift is, what it says about his subjective understanding of his actions, and what consequences it has for his ability to repent, therefore, all depend somewhat on whether it counts as a gift *inter vivos* or *mortis causa*. If Faustus is trying to make a gift *inter vivos* that only takes effect at the end of twenty-four years upon the fulfillment of the listed conditions, it is almost certainly legally invalid because of the delay.¹⁹ However, it may be effective in a theological

rather than a strictly legalistic sense if Faustus here is in fact affirming his predestinate reprobate status, committing an unpardonable act confirming his damnation, or becoming a “spirit.” In this case, the deed functions as a self-executing document, but one that works by a mechanism other than the one it purports to stand for, much in the same way as Mephistophilis claims that he was summoned by Faustus’s incantations “*per accidens*” rather than by any compelling power in Faustus’s words (1.3.46).

The other option is to read Faustus’s deed as effecting a gift *mortis causa*. As I note above, there are good reasons to interpret Faustus’s decision to seek a pact with the devil as conditioned by his concern with death and his desire to control his relation to his own personal end. The gift is certainly made on account of death in a generalized sense. However, death is not mentioned explicitly in the deed, and indeed, Faustus’s description of what he will be giving Lucifer – “full power to fetch or carry the said John Faustus, body and soul, flesh, blood, or goods into their habitation wheresoever” (2.1.109-11) – euphemistically avoids direct reference to death by keeping “body and soul” together, and by talking about Faustus as a chattel to be fetched or carried to a habitation, rather than as a reprobate to be taken into hell. Yet, even if it does not ultimately fulfill the criteria needed for this type of gift in Justinian’s *Institutes*, the deed will still function as a gift *mortis causa* in an extra-legal sense, since it takes effect on death, and indeed creates the conditions of death necessary for its completion. We have both a *donatio mortis causa* and a *mors donatis causa*; a gift on account of death and a death on account of a gift.

Why the treatment of Faustus's deed, and the way it holds up to analysis under different legal interpretations and theological understandings, matters becomes clear when we compare it with the treatment of Worldly Man's will in *Enough is as Good as a Feast*. As discussed above, Wager uses the necessary coincidence between worldly and godly behavior on the death bed (so that a godly will still needs to have some worldly content, while a worldly will still has to respect religious formalities) to present Worldly Man's behavior as derivative and parodic, and hence to affirm a hierarchical relationship between the sacred and the secular. In Marlowe's depiction of Faustus's pact, there is a similar coincidence of different possible registers in an overdetermined theologico-legal document. As in Wager, this coincidence has dramatic utility, since it simultaneously captures the experiential position of the individual with a necessarily limited, largely secular, outlook, and a religious framework in which he is embedded. However, *Faustus* differs from *Enough* in that the relationship between these different registers is unresolved both in the scene and in the play as a whole, and they lie against one another much less smoothly. It is unclear who is making instrumental use of what, and whether the sacred is governing the secular or *vice versa*. The devils' use of a specific legal instrument, and their investment in formalities such as obtaining Faustus's signature, suggests that they place some value in the mechanisms of the law to confirm their right to Faustus's soul. Yet, as I have shown above, the problems with the drafting of a deed of prospective gift are sufficiently serious for it to be unlikely that it could have any direct legal force. Instead, it could only have a hold over Faustus because of the theological significance of what it reveals about

Faustus's intent. Moreover, in the depiction of Faustus's deed of gift with its inconclusive legal significance, Marlowe also generates fissures within the worldly, legalistic understanding of what is going on. The binary Wager exploits between the worldly and the godly can itself be subdivided into further incompatible, yet coincident, governing frameworks.

What holds these different legal and religious frameworks together is the anticipated event of Faustus's death. The deed refers to this only in obscure, euphemistic terms. Faustus' promise to the devils of his "body and soul, flesh, blood, or goods" (2.1.110) is confusing. There is no conclusive way to parse the clause so that it is clear what parts of this gift are cumulative and which parts are alternative, and so no clear exposition of what exactly death involves the loss or separation of. Death, we might say, is making itself felt as something undefined and unrepresentable, which the deed anticipates and needs, but which it also gets repressed. However, the very hesitation and ambiguity about how death is functioning with relation to the deed – the question of whether it is *inter vivos* or *mortis causa* – also allows Faustus to have a relation and a degree of agency with regard to it. Specifically, the question of exactly what the deed means and how it conditions Faustus's death depends on whether he has the subjective intention to sign it on account of death or not. Here is where we might see Faustus's practice of an idiosyncratic art of dying, which doesn't successfully challenge a religious understanding of the practice of death from a secular or legalistic perspective, but does find a certain autonomy for itself in the slippage between sacred and secular and in its refusal to explicate the basis on which it functions. In this context, the

deed as legal instrument also becomes a deed as action, since its completion marks one of the only times in the play where Faustus appears to have a degree of agency with regard to his death.

It would be a mistake to claim too much theatrical significance for the ambiguity surrounding the nature of Faustus's deed of gift. The legal problem is both technical and deeply submerged, and so not something that would be likely to occur to more than a very small subsection of any theater audience. Its importance lies more in its potential as a means of figuring a way of being towards death than in its dramatic impact in *Faustus*. I do want to suggest, though, that the enabling role of opacity in this moment has a more visible partial analogue in Faustus's conjurations of the dead Alexander and Helen, where silent figures, to some degree under Faustus's control, and bearing intimate but unclear relations to death, are made the focus of onstage attention. This attention is characterized by repetitions that advertise an inability on the part of onlookers to comprehend the spirits representing the dead figures in any satisfactory way. The overall impression is of incommensurability between living and the dead – but incommensurability that does not preclude the attempt to form relations.

When the Emperor first asks Faustus to show him Alexander and his paramour, Faustus emphasizes that the “true substantial bodies of those two deceased princes... long since are consumed to dust” (4.1.46-7). Instead, the Emperor is told he will be shown “such spirits as can lively resemble” the couple (4.1.50). The spirits, when they enter, do not speak, and Faustus does not provide any commentary on their appearance, but the Emperor reacts to them by repeating

Faustus's earlier comments back almost verbatim: "Sure these are no spirits, but the true substantial bodies of these two deceased princes" (4.1.68-9). The structure of Helen's first appearance is very similar. The first scholar asks Faustus to show "that peerless dame of Greece, whom all the world admires for majesty" (5.1.13-14), and when Helen appears, the second scholar responds with an echo: "Too simple is my wit to tell her praise, /Whom all the world admires for majesty" (5.1.25-26).²⁰

Faustus does, famously, provide a far more articulate lyrical meditation on Helen when she appears to him again. But here too he expresses redundancy, stasis and disbelief through the circular fantasies of Helen sucking forth his soul and returning it to him. His conclusion "And none but thou shalt be my paramour" (5.1.109) echoes back the request he earlier made to Mephistophilis "That I might have [Helen] unto my paramour" (5.1.83), which triggered her entrance. Most significantly, Faustus's question—"Was this the face that launched a thousand ships /And burnt the topless towers of Ilium?"—relates these repeated expressions of wonder to awareness of mortality (5.1.90-91). The lines are a free translation from Lucian's *Dialogues of the Dead*, where Lucian depicts a conversation between Hermes and the recently deceased Menippus, who has arrived in the underworld and wishes to be shown "all the beauties of old." Hermes helps Menippus to distinguish the skull of Helen from a collection of "bones and bare skulls, most of them looking the same," and on seeing it he asks "Was it then for this that the thousand ships were manned from all Greece, for this that so many Greeks and barbarians fell, and so many cities were devastated?"²¹ As much as disbelief in the

presence of indescribable beauty, Faustus's question expresses a sense of incommensurability between the living and the dead.²²

The conjured spirits are simultaneously figured as occasions for wonder and as only very imperfectly captured by the wonder they generate, since little that observers can say in response to them is different from what they said before they arrived. Repetition serves to draw attention to specific formulations and render them strange in ways that raise questions about the ontological status of Alexander and Helen. How seriously should we take the Emperor's insistence that these must be "true substantial bodies?" In part, I suggest, these spirits represent the dead viewed as a problem. Consequently, though they are not explicitly linked to Faustus's death, and it would be hard to interpret the responses that Faustus and other characters have to them as performances of dying, they do create an association between death and opacity, and explore the extent to which opacity can generate a viable representative strategy for death.

III.

I have suggested that attempts to anticipate and understand death (and in particular bad death) saturate *Doctor Faustus*. An anticipation of death inspires Faustus's turn to magic and agreement with Lucifer, and questions about what death means and how it should be approached continue to be raised even during the comic action that fills most of the middle acts.²³ It is only in the final act of the play, however, that the focus turns specifically and consistently to the questions about how Faustus might approach his own death. Beginning with Wagner's observation that his "master means to die shortly" (5.1.1), and ending with the Chorus'

summation of Faustus's life and the drawing of a moral, Act Five deals explicitly with the practice of dying, and brings the play closest formally and thematically to the models of the *artes moriendi* and the Homiletic Tragedies. Like Wager and Woodes, Marlowe illustrates the protagonist's damnation in part through his near approach to, and parody of, appropriate deathbed postures. However, Marlowe resists creating a clearly hierarchical relationship between godly and vicious behavior, and presents so many different understandings of how to die that it becomes difficult to tell what is the model and what the parody. The play repeatedly shows apparently sincere and orthodox attempts to assist Faustus in dying well falling short as practices, and the accumulation of these successive failed efforts only emphasizes their inadequacy. It is tempting, therefore, to conclude that the repeated enactment of unsuccessful performances of dying constitutes a rejection of *ars moriendi* as a genre. I argue instead, though, that the final act's almost obsessive focus on the staging of dying, and on ways of being towards dying, shows there is something about the arts of dying that Marlowe does not wish to abandon. Rather than implying that *ars moriendi* is a failure, the final act of *Faustus* asks whether it is possible to create a performable *ars moriendi* in and through failure.

The fifth act opens with Wagner describing Faustus back in Wittenberg after an extended period of travel. He is embedded in the close-knit sociality of the university, and indulging in behavior that seems inappropriate to a dying man:

I think my master means to die shortly,
For he hath given me all his goods;
And yet me thinkes if that death were near

He would not banquet and carouse and swill
Amongst the students, as even now he doth,
Who are at supper with such belly-cheer
As Wagner ne'er beheld in all his life. (5.1.1-8)

In Wagner's account, Faustus's relation to his imminent death is muddled in a way that reflects the peculiarities of his position. Faustus is both cognizant of his impending end and in denial. On the one hand, he prepares for his death by charitably giving away his possessions. On the other, his banqueting recalls the behavior of reprobates in commonplace anecdotes warning against *mors improvisa*.²⁴ However, Wagner says nothing about how Faustus's inconsistent actions should be evaluated, articulating two contradictory thoughts about whether Faustus is close to death and then disappearing from the play for good, without determining which thought is more accurate, or even which he would prefer. This is not so much a failure of *ars moriendi* as it is a refusal even to engage in *ars moriendi* in any prescriptive or evaluative sense.

Following Wagner's introductory speech, Faustus's encounters with the Old Man and with Helen stand out as set pieces of heightened rhetoric organized in part around notions of death and dying. Helen and the Old Man represent very different worldviews, and the manner in which their appearances reconfigure one another evokes the parodic dynamic I have identified in reprobate deaths in the Homiletic Tragedies. In *Faustus*, though, it is hard to separate the good death from the bad, as no reconfiguration appears conclusive.

The Old Man calls on Faustus to repent, using strategies that closely follow recommendations to onlookers at the deathbed in the *ars moriendi* tradition.²⁵ He strives to bring Faustus to recognize his spiritual condition by making him aware of his “most vile and loathsome filthiness” (5.1.41). And when Faustus takes this too much to heart and almost succumbs to despair, the Old Man reminds him of the possibility of grace through the emblem of the hovering angel. The extent to which the Old Man recasts language and metaphors used by reprobate characters at earlier points in the play in orthodox terms is striking. His first speech is an orthodox version of Faustus’s first soliloquy. Faustus had attempted to reconcile incompatible understandings of endings, as defined in various academic disciplines, with different understandings of the proper goals and aspirations of human life. By exhorting Faustus to “guide thy steps unto the way of life, /By which sweet path thy may’st attain the goal /That shall conduct thee to celestial rest” (5.1.36-8), the Old Man envisions life both as a linear movement along a path and as a teleological striving towards “the goal,” and then asserts that these two understandings can coincide. Similarly, the Old Man echoes and repurposes some of the imagery of Faustus’s pact when he says “Break heart, drop blood, and mingle it with tears” (5.1.39). The line harks back to another instance when body and the soul seem to behave independently: Faustus’s blood congeals when he tries to sign the deed, and can only be made to flow again when it is heated. The free-flowing blood the Old Man envisions would redeem the artificially reliquified blood representing Faustus’s diabolical deal. Since the Old Man omits any personal pronoun, the command sounds as though it is addressed to Faustus’s heart conceived as an actual physical

organ rather than to Faustus as an autonomous consciousness. This rendering of repentance as bodily would both figure its location in human, embodied experience, and demonstrate the degree to which it cannot be willed but must come through grace.

Given his echoes of earlier Faustian conceits in orthodox terms, it makes sense to align the Old Man with the resolution of parodic deathbed behavior into hierarchical assertions of a metaphysical order at the end of the Homiletic Tragedies. Faustus's search for a *telos* compatible with a life lived sequentially, and his blood-signed pact with the devil, are both refigured as debased and perverted derivatives of orthodox ideas. I suggest, though, that what follows complicates this reading and makes the hierarchy it sets up difficult to sustain. After the Old Man leaves the stage, Faustus is quickly brought back to the devil's side and it is in the context of his again confirming his vow to Lucifer that he makes a request

To glut the longing of my heart's desire:
That I might have unto my paramour
That heavenly Helen which I saw of late
Whose sweet embracings may extinguish clean
These thoughts that do dissuade me from my vow,
And keep mine oath I made to Lucifer. (5.1.81-7)

By suggesting the desired vision of Helen will extinguish his thoughts of repentance, Faustus explicitly frames it as a counter to the Old Man's exhortations. He reworks some of the Old Man's imagery to emphasize this. Faustus's use of the word "extinguish" implies that both this speech and the anticipated encounter with Helen

should be understood as explorations of death, and rejects the Old Man's emphasis on paths and processes in favor of sudden, "clean" endings. The claim that Helen will "glut the longing of my heart's desire" echoes the manner in which the Old Man's address to Faustus separates Faustus's heart from Faustus. But here the heart is aligned with lust rather than with repentance. Though there is no reason to take Faustus's image of the heart, or his vision of how endings work, as more authoritative than the Old Man's, this speech does show that the tactic of recasting an opponent's postures and imagery in an attempt to position them as derivative or parodic instances of one's own postures is equally available to the orthodox and the unorthodox.

Helen's actual appearance, which functions as a moment of genuine aesthetic revelation for Faustus, provides an interesting contrast with the Old Man's behavior immediately following. The Old Man's ultimate fate is unclear. Mephistophilis promises that "what I may afflict his body with /I will attempt" (5.1.79-80), and the Old Man's final words, "hence I fly unto my God" (5.1.118), could be taken as a sign that, at the least, he is imagining his possible death. What we are looking at here, then, is potentially a death scene – the good death to balance Faustus's wretched one and to exemplify the model of dying implied in the Old Man's exhortations. Given this, it is worth thinking about how attractive the Old Man's vision of his death actually is:

Satan begins to sift me with his pride;
As in this furnace God shall try my faith,
My faith, vile hell, shall triumph over thee!

Ambitious fiends, see how the heaven smiles

At your repulse, and laughs your state to scorn:

Hence, hell, for hence I fly unto my God. (5.1.113-18)

The Old Man's eager anticipation of death as a test of faith at the devils' hands is juxtaposed with Faustus's fantasy of Helen. Parallels between the two characters' visions of triumph (over Menelaus or over hell) and of flying souls, and between the ways in which both speeches are addressed to unspeaking, demonic figures (since "Helen" is, in fact, a spirit), encourage particularly close comparison. These parallels produce divergent effects. The Old Man is always emphatically orthodox, and there is ample religious justification and precedent for everything he does and says. Because of this, his words here partly recapitulate the dynamic I have been tracing in his earlier speeches. Insofar as Faustus's language and behavior brings him close to the Old Man, he represents a bad alternative that emphasizes the Old Man's goodness and indicates ways in which Faustus's sin is a debased, inferior derivative of virtue. This tactic, however, becomes less effective the more it appears, since it starts to look inconclusive; rather than a fundamental recasting of Faustus's actions as parodic, what emerges is an indefinitely iterable sequence in which images recirculate with different significances. Orthodoxy never makes a statement heterodoxy cannot respond to.

Crucially, the positioning of Faustus's fantasy of Helen before the Old Man's fantasy of heaven can make the former appear original and the latter derivative. This weighting of the two fantasies is particularly tempting because Faustus's invocation of Helen is more rhetorically ambitious and inventive. Moreover, if

Faustus's vision does appear more attractive, or more imaginative, than the very orthodoxy of the Old Man means that this evaluation tends to denigrate orthodoxy *per se*. Another way to put this would be to say that the juxtaposition of Faustus's speech to Helen and the Old Man's taunting of the devils demands evaluation on both religious and artistic grounds, but the play uses aesthetic markers for different religious positions so that aesthetic judgments can bleed into religious ones and *vice versa*. This is a development from the superimposition of elements of an everyman figure on a reprobate protagonist that I have discussed in the Homiletic Tragedies. Where the Homiletic Tragedies always ultimately provide a clear hierarchy in which the godly is superior to the worldly, Marlowe's play makes judgment harder.

The Old Man's attempted intervention is complemented by Faustus's encounter with the scholars, which draws heavily on a different strand of the *ars moriendi* tradition, but which again fails to help Faustus die well. Faustus's meeting with the scholars reflects an understanding of death as a communal event, during which friends and neighbors gather round the dying individual to offer support and advice. Faustus's damnation marks his encounter with the scholars as a failed *ars moriendi*, and one that closely resembles the debased death scenes at the end of the Homiletic Tragedies, which also typically have this communal format. Where Marlowe's play differs from the earlier examples, though, is in not ascribing this failure entirely to Faustus or to the devils. In *Enough is as Good as a Feast*, Worldly Man is surrounded on his deathbed by vices, who work actively to pervert appropriate deathbed behavior. In *The Conflict of Conscience*, Philologus has good spiritual advisors, and his inability to pray is presented as a consequence of his

spiritual failings alone. In *Doctor Faustus*, by contrast, the community institutions that should support the *moriens* are portrayed as sincere, but inadequate.

Typically in *ars moriendi* texts, onlookers are required to take an active role in questioning the *moriens* on his creed, while he merely affirms his faith and avoids disputation.²⁶ In his dialogue with the scholars, however, Faustus himself takes over the role of spiritual advisor, summing up the spiritual situation he finds himself in, and directing the conversation. As Stachniewski observes, the scene on one level is indicative of Faustus's despair, which is evident from hyperbolic comments such as "Faustus' offence can ne'er be pardoned: the serpent that tempted Eve may be saved, but not Faustus" (5.2.14-15), and Faustus's general insistence on the enormity of his sin.²⁷ Yet Faustus does not adopt a posture of pure abjection. He sets himself up as the intellectual authority in the conversation, remembering his achievements even while purportedly regretting them, and asserting his theological perceptions as definitive. He also claims a kind of moral authority over the scholars, showing concern for their physical and spiritual wellbeing when he advises them to leave him. Perhaps more surprisingly, the scholars are willing to cede an active role to Faustus, and themselves adopt the choral, reactive position more usually associated with the *moriens*. The fact that they decline to stay with him, instead praying in the next room, looks like a failure of courage, and proves to be of no help in the event. Faustus turns the conversation into a diabolical inversion of the model deathbed scene, in which the dying reprobate acts as spiritual advisor to survivors who take his instructions. Once again, Marlowe borrows the Homiletic Tragedy trick of depicting wicked behavior

as a parodic reworking of godly behavior, but does not provide an explicit and authoritative perspective within the play from which this behavior can be assessed as inferior and parodic.

Throughout the final act of *Faustus*, then, traditional models of communal death drawing on the Christian *ars moriendi* have been invoked only to be shown up as unsatisfactory. Once the scholars leave the stage, Faustus is alone, with the apparent opportunity to approach death in a new way. He certainly does offer up very different understandings of dying from anything that the play has shown earlier, referring to Hermetic, Pythagorean, Epicurean models of death alongside heretical suggestions of an existence in hell of limited duration. However, at no time does he alight upon a mode of dying that appears sustainable. If anything, the pattern of failed arts of dying established over the earlier part of the final act becomes more emphatic as a panicked Faustus cycles through different philosophies, in each case acknowledging their falseness or inapplicability to his situation.

From a purely characterological perspective, Faustus's various death fantasies must, like his responses to the Old Man and to the scholars, be taken as indications of despair and sinfulness. This sinfulness is evident both in his sense that he does not have time to repent and must be "damn'd perpetually" (5.2.60), and in his heterodox entertainment of pagan and heretical understandings of the nature of the soul and the afterlife. It would be hard to argue that any of the ideas Faustus entertains in the speech enable him to die better in a religious or even an aesthetic sense. The vacuum left by the failure of conventional *artes moriendi* in the first part

of the final act does not give Faustus an opportunity to approach his death in an affirmative manner; it simply clears a space in which he can fail to die well without any outside interference.

What the soliloquy does not amount to, however, is a rejection of *ars moriendi* as a genre. As Faustus abandons each individual alternative model of death, he moves on to a new one, suggesting that he finds some value simply in the rehearsal of different practices of dying. To take one example:

Why wert thou not a creature wanting soul?

Or why is it immortal that thou hast?

Ah, Pythagoras' metempsychosis, were that true

This soul should fly from me, and I be chang'd

Unto some brutish beast,

All beasts are happy, for when they die

Their souls are soon dissolv'd in elements (5.2.97-103)

Faustus scarcely makes an attempt to sustain his Pythagorean fantasies as valid. He begins with rhetorical questions demonstrating awareness that he is not a creature wanting an immortal soul, and acknowledges that metempsychosis is not true. His logic is associative and his terms are muddled. When he talks about his soul "fly[ing] from me," "me" is presumably the body. But in the second half of the line, "I" is described as something to be transformed into a beast, presumably through the transmigration of a soul, so that "I" has to be the soul rather than the body. Then the Pythagorean framework is silently dropped, as the happiness of beasts is linked to the fact that their souls are mortal – something that Pythagoras believes precisely

not to be the case. What the speech dramatizes, then, is not a viable or consistent art of dying, but the act of continually producing arts of dying. Faustus here looks less like a *moriens* who tries seriously to approach dying as a practice, than like an author of multiple *artes moriendi*. His existence has become the continuous generation of ways to approach death. This activity is in one sense a doomed search for a viable means of dying that would bring Faustus's subjective experience into line with a metaphysical order. At the same time, though, the fact that Faustus never arrives at a viable art of dying means his speech can be conceptualized as an act of resistance, as a marker of ways in which human experience is *not* subsumed by its metaphysical context. This resistance emerges precisely through the acts by which it tries to efface itself.

Significantly, there are even suggestions that Faustus does not, in fact, die, but rather becomes caught up in an endless process of dying, so that this production of arts of dying could theoretically continue after Faustus is taken to hell. The play never explains precisely what happens after the devils come for Faustus. The term of the agreement that empowers Lucifer to "fetch or carry" Faustus's "body and soul, flesh, blood, or goods" (2.1.109-10) cannot be definitively explicated so that it is clear which terms are cumulative and which are alternative. The ambiguity about what exactly the devils get from the bargain persists in the final act in Faustus's fear that his soul "must live still to be plagu'd in hell" (5.2.104) and in his claim that Lucifer will bear him "quick to hell" (5.2.109). Faustus suggests that his death might not be a death at all, or at least that it is not absolutely distinct from life. While one could read these lines by themselves simply as evidence of Faustus's state of denial,

they are echoed by the Chorus, who describes Faustus as “gone” rather than as “dead” (Epilogue, 4). When Faustus tells the scholars, “now I die eternally” (5.2.4), his primary reference is presumably to the Pauline characterization of damnation as spiritual death. But a possible secondary implication is that Faustus’s existence from this point forward will be an eternity of dying.²⁸ The play asserts a heavenly order that determines Faustus’s fall, but even after this fall something of Faustus persists as a continually failing, but never ceasing, performance of dying.

In this context, Faustus’s earlier assertion that “hell’s a fable” (2.1.28) assumes new significance and greater accuracy. His dying, and perhaps his afterlife, is a production of fabulous narratives of death. Furthermore, the metatheatrical sense in which Faustus is correct – since the only hell shown onstage is a fabulous one – ties his production of modes of dying to the aesthetic production of death and damnation represented by Marlowe’s tragedy. Perhaps the only form of *ars moriendi* that remains possible in a Calvinist context is one that lacks any value or significance beyond its own creation and performance.

Other aspects of the framing of the final soliloquy, however, gesture toward the possibility of a more confident art of dying distinct from the homiletic tradition. Something very peculiar is going on with the time scheme of Faustus’s final speech. Faustus makes a bid for temporal dilation when he asks

That time may cease, and midnight never come!

Fair nature’s eye, rise, rise again, and make

Perpetual day, or let this hour be but a year,

A month, a week, a natural day,

That Faustus may repent, and save his soul. (5.2.62-66) ²⁹

While Faustus wants time to slow, his speech formally enacts compression, as increasingly short time periods are substituted for perpetuity. Consequently, the speech simultaneously gestures toward dilation and contraction. Faustus's evocation of contradictory temporal movements finds an analogue in the mismatch between stage time and real time. The movement of Faustus's final hour as marked by the striking of the clock is quite obviously faster than that represented by the duration of any feasible actor's performance of the speech. In effect, the dramatization of the final soliloquy evokes three different time schemes: the extended one of Faustus's fantasies, the compressed one marked by the clock, and the real one experienced by the audience and players.

What reconciles these different temporalities is the arrival of midnight, which at once marks the end of the period Faustus hopes to extend, the end of the compressed hour, and, if not the end of time itself, then the end of the time devoted to the performance of the play. The structural importance of midnight is made still more pointed for readers (as opposed to viewers) of the A-text, by Marlowe's ending tag *Terminat hora diem, terminat Author opus* [the hour ends the day, the author ends the work]. This line reaches forwards and backwards beyond the play as a performance into both the moment of its production and its textual afterlife, impossibly asserting that the narrative, the writing of the play, its performance, and its reading all end in a single terminus.

As I argue above, the Homiletic Tragedies assert a hierarchical relationship between a human experiential perspective and a heavenly order at the moment of

death, as the reprobate's behavior is marked as parodic, and subordinated to a divine standard. This subordination resolves difficulties generated by the adaptation of the traditional dramatic figure of the everyman to a Calvinist context, by affirming that the protagonist's gestures towards godly behavior are more apparent than real. Because it reconciles inconsistent time schemes at the moment of Faustus's damnation, midnight has a role in Faustus somewhat analogous to that of death in the earlier plays. Dramatic time schemes that cannot be made to line up because they move at different speeds coincide at a moment of ending so that the tensions between them disappear. Importantly, however, the reconciliation midnight achieves is less obviously hierarchical than those that occur at the end of the Homiletic Tragedies, especially in the printed A-text. The paratactic structure of "*Terminat hora diem, terminat Author opus*" implies a relation between the two clauses, while declining to specify it as causal. The author brings about the end of the hour just as much as the hour determines the end of the play. Faustus's inability to slow time in the way that he desires perhaps marks his perspective as inferior, but the control asserted by the author in the Latin tag means that a subordination of Faustus does not necessarily translate into the subordination of human experience.

There are, then, two distinct models of ending in Faustus's final soliloquy: Faustus's continuous production of failing *artes moriendi* without any necessary endpoint, and the depersonalized assertion of midnight as a terminus in which all time-schemes are reconciled. The former is obviously closer to the dramatization of an experiential perspective, while the latter looks more like an imposition of metaphysical order. In consequence, their coincidence seems to recapitulate the

dynamic I have traced in the Homiletic Tragedies in a register that gives more weight to human experience. Faustus, the bad author of unsustainable, ineffective *artes moriendi*, is subsumed by a Latin tag that allows authorial participation in a transcendent terminus. However, midnight in *Faustus* lacks any explicit link to the divine, and only brings about resolution through ending in a nominal sense. The ending tag asserts a purely formal control that bears no relation to the panicked, despairing content that fills up Faustus's final hour. An aesthetically pleasing and meaningful dramatized art of dying that makes sense in a Calvinist context is consequently an aspiration gestured to beyond the stage and the text, rather than something actually seen in *Faustus*.

IV.

It is perhaps significant that during the final act of *Faustus*, traditional communal *ars moriendi* models, in which observers surround a *moriens*, are suppressed in favor of individuals trying to understand their endings in a writerly way. Figures of authors and readers start to assume greater potency relative to the figures of performers and observers, until the final bid for human participation in endings represented by the Latin tag exists only for readers and the author on the page, and has no analogue in performance. The shift of focus from performer to text-based author in *Faustus*, moreover, echoes a historical movement of Calvinist homiletic authors away from drama into other formats. Though its date of composition is unclear, *Faustus* certainly belongs to the generation of plays written after the widespread alliance between Protestantism and theater that had produced the genre of Homiletic Tragedy had broken down, and after anti-theatrical

sentiment had become increasingly common among English Protestants. Strikingly, Paul White exemplifies this breakdown through the figure of William Wager, author of *Enough is as Good as a Feast*, who stopped writing plays after the 1570's even as he remained "active in the Anglican ministry well into the 1580s."³⁰

This background should caution us against reading Marlowe's adaptations of Homiletic Tragedy simply as acts of demystification that gesture toward an emergent, secular theater. If Marlowe in *Faustus* implies dissatisfaction with the easily gained, hierarchizing conclusions of the Homiletic Tragedies, he is in a sense only mirroring dissatisfactions increasingly felt (though for different reasons) by former writers of the genre with the whole notion of Protestant drama. The Homiletic Tragedy had already been largely abandoned by its practitioners as a failed art of dying before Marlowe revived it. Rather than functioning *as* an orthodox or heterodox play, *Faustus* might be best read as a play *about* orthodoxy, and as a play interested in exploring why sustaining a Calvinist drama centered on a reprobate is so difficult. That Marlowe conducts this exploration by writing a Homiletic Tragedy suggests he sees value in the constraints the genre places upon human action, and the ways in which it shows reprobate behavior approaching and moving away from godly behavior, while always in some sense being irreparably damned. If anything, indeed, Marlowe's development of this inherited model in *Faustus* suggests he takes its implications more seriously than his predecessors. He refuses simply to close down the experiential perspective of his central character, instead looking for a way to represent the dying reprobate's subjective experience of activity in the face of death.

Consequently *Doctor Faustus*, is itself a sort of dramatization of the bad death of the Calvinist drama of dying badly. Failure circulates pervasively, especially in the final act of the play, attaching to Faustus, the communal institutions that should support him as he dies, and the means by which death can be represented on stage. *Faustus* rejects the form of hierarchical resolution that emerges at the end of the Homiletic Tragedies, but does not have anything with which to replace it. The audience, readers, performers and author all participate, like Faustus, in a hopeless search for a satisfactory way to understand the end.

¹ Christopher Marlowe, *Doctor Faustus*, ed. Michael Keefer, 2nd ed. (Ontario: Broadview, 2007), Epilogue.5. Further line references will be given parenthetically.

² When and to what extent Calvinist understandings of predestination were adopted in England is debatable. In *Anti-Calvinists: The Rise of English Arminianism c. 1590-1640* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987), Nicholas Tyacke argues Calvinism was in ascendancy among both the church hierarchy and the laity by the 1590s, though he qualifies his stance in *Aspects of English Protestantism c. 1530 – 1700* (Manchester: Manchester UP, 2001). By contrast, Peter White claims that doctrinaire Calvinism was not universal even among members of the reform persuasion, and emphasizes the extent to which the Thirty-Nine Articles, and even the Lambeth Articles, were compromises. See Peter White, *Predestination, Policy and Polemic* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1992). Peter Lake attempts to chart a middle course by distinguishing between “credal” and “experimental” Calvinism – that is between purely formal subscriptions to predestinarian beliefs, and concerted attempts to embrace the doctrine – and arguing that Calvinism functions as an umbrella term to cover individuals displaying various levels of enthusiasm or theological positions in “Calvinism and the English Church 1570 – 1635,” *Past and Present*, 114 (1987): 32-76; see also a different taxonomy in Sean Hughes “The Problem of ‘Calvinism’: English theologies of predestination c. 1580-1630” in *Belief and Practice in Reformation England* ed. Susan Wabuda and Caroline Litzenberger (Aldershot: Ashgate, 1998). Surveying the field, Peter Marshall concludes that “the evidence for the growing dominance of Calvin over the thought of English theologians and churchmen remains powerfully convincing” in *Reformation England 1480-1642*, 2nd edn. (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2012), 139. However, questions remain about how far predestinarian was disseminated among the general populace. Edmund Duffy argues for the widespread persistence of Catholic beliefs while Ian Green and Christopher Haigh suggest that protestant ministers had limited success in disseminating predestinarian ideas. See Edmund Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars: Traditional Religion in England 1400-1580* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992); Ian Green, *The Christian’s ABC: Catechisms and Catechizing in England c. 1530-1740* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996); Christopher Haigh, “Success and Failure in the English Reformation,” *Past and Present*, 173 (2001), 28-49. In contrast, Arnold Hunt finds evidence of more widespread interest and understanding of Calvinist beliefs in *The Art of Hearing: English Preachers and Their Audiences, 1590-1640* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

Among literary critics, Alan Sinfield argues strongly for the pervasive influence of Calvinism in literature in general and in *Doctor Faustus* in particular in *Literature in Protestant England 1560-1660* (Beckenham: Croom Helm, 1983). R. G. Hunter and Leah Marcus present the play’s theology as

strategically mixed. See R.G. Hunter, *Shakespeare and the Mystery of God's Judgments* (Athens: U of Georgia P, 1976); Leah Marcus, *Unediting the Renaissance: Shakespeare, Marlowe and Milton* (London: Routledge, 1996). In this essay I am interested in tracing out Marlowe's responses to a tradition of Calvinist drama and to predestinarian beliefs by focusing on elements of the text that clearly reflect concerns about Faustus's agency over his fate. To say that *Faustus* is in part a play about Calvinism, however, is not the same as saying that it is a Calvinist play, and I do not wish to deny that other moments in the play (and especially the B-text) hint at Arminianism, or remain theologically non-specific.

³ Augustine is the point of origin for the view that human action distinct from God can only be evil. See, for example, his assertion "Our good lives always with Thee, from which when we are avert we are perverted," *Confessions*, trans. William Watts, ed. W. H. D. Rouse, Loeb Classical Library 27 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1912), 4.16. Martin Luther holds that "free choice in all men alike has the same limitations: it can will nothing good," *The Bondage of the Will*, in *Luther and Erasmus: Free Will and Salvation*, trans. Philip S. Watson (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1969), 228. Similarly, Jean Calvin says "we hold that all human desires are evil, and we charge them with sin not in as far as they are natural, but because they are inordinate, and inordinate because nothing pure and upright can proceed from a corrupt and polluted nature," *Institutes of the Christian Religion* trans. Henry Beveridge (London: Arnold Hatfield, 1599), 3.3.12.

⁴ In particular, my project extends Alan Sinfield's reading of *Faustus* as a drama of reprobation by asking what opportunity is nevertheless available for Faustus to act in and through his own reprobation.

⁵ David Bevington, *From Mankind to Marlowe* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1962), 162.

⁶ Bevington, 247.

⁷ W. Wager, *The Longer thou Livest the more Fool thou art, and Enough is as Good as a Feast*, ed. R. Mark Benbow (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1967). Line references will be given in the text.

⁸ Compare Luther, "if [the ungodly] did good works for the sake of obtaining the Kingdom, they would never obtain it, but would rather belong among the ungodly who with an evil and mercenary eye 'seek their own' in God" (*The Bondage of the Will*, 212).

⁹ See Ariès 189-90. Thomas Becon in *The Sicke Mans Salve* presents the dictation of the *moriens* figure Epaphroditus' will at length, implying he sees it as spiritually significant, rather than distractingly worldly (102). Similarly, William Perkins in *A Salve for a Sicke Man* discusses wills under the heading of duties a sick man owes to his neighbour, and cites Genesis 27 and Genesis 49 as grounds for stating that "this duetie of making a will is a matter of great waight and importance... It is not a matter of indifferency" (155).

¹⁰ Becon, 102.

¹¹ Nathaniel Woodes, *The Conflict of Conscience* (1581), ed. Herbert Davis and F. P. Wilson (London: Malone Society Reprints, 1952). Line references will be given in the text.

¹² A peculiarity of *Conflict of Conscience*, which emphasizes the potential closeness in appearance between the godly and the reprobate, is that a revision of the play was printed with a happy ending, in which Philologus' faith is restored. Woodes rewrites the messenger's speech to convey this information, but changes nothing in the body of the play. See R. G. Hunter for speculation on the reasons for the rewrite and analysis of its significance (36).

¹³ Mephistophilis' first gift to Faustus is a book that provides a definitive account of magic, astronomy and botany (2.2.165-76). The appearance of a spirit in the form of Helen of Troy creates an association between the classical tradition and the devils.

¹⁴ A possible exception is the Good Angel, which, however, is neutered by always appearing with the Bad Angel. I follow Ruth Lunney's argument that Faustus' perception of the angels is imperfect in a way that counts against seeing them as embodied representatives of divine and diabolical forces rather than as psychological projections. See Ruth Lunney, *Marlowe and the Popular Tradition: Innovation in the English Drama Before 1595* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002), 124-57.

¹⁵ C. L. Barber, *Creating Elizabethan Tragedy: The Theater of Marlowe and Kyd*, ed. Richard P. Wheeler (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988).

¹⁶ Edward A. Snow, "Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus* and the Ends of Desire," *Two Renaissance Mythmakers: Christopher Marlowe and Ben Jonson*, ed. Alvin Kernan (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1977), 78.

¹⁷ See *The English Faust Book* (1592), ed. John Henry Jones (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1994), 97. Other critical accounts of the twenty-four year pact which explicitly link it to Faustus' interest in his own death include Christopher Rick's assertion that in the context of plague-ridden London, where death is everywhere, Faustus is buying a the certainty of a few more years of life, and Snow's suggestion that the defined term eliminates contingency and gives Faustus mastery over years that become teleologically organized towards a known end-point as "his." See Christopher Ricks, "*Doctor Faustus* and Hell on Earth," *Essays in Criticism*, 35 (1985): 101-20, 108; Snow, 101.

¹⁸ Justinian, *Institutes*, trans. Peter Birks and Grant McLeod with the Latin text of Paul Krueger (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1987), 2.7.

¹⁹ This is Luke Wilson's view, and he discusses the failure of Faustus' deed, and of the legal issues raised by pacts with the devil more generally, in the context of developing understandings of intention in contract law and theater. Luke Wilson, *Theaters of Intention: Drama and the Law in Early Modern England* (Stanford: Stanford UP, 2000) 208-9.

²⁰ Emily Bartels discusses the comic dimensions of the Scholars' repetition and hyperbole in *Spectacles of Strangeness* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1993), 136.

²¹ Lucian, *The Dialogues of the Dead in Lucian VII* trans. M.D. Macleod, Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1961), 5.

²² Richard Halpern analyzes other ways in which the question generates undercurrents of incredulity or disappointment in the response to Helen in "Marlowe's Theater of the Night: *Doctor Faustus* and Capital," *ELH* 71 no. 2 (2004): 483.

²³ Instances where the presence of death is particularly noticeable include the episodes when the Friars curse Faustus to hell, when the Emperor questions the relationship between the spirits representing Alexander and his paramour and the "true substantial bodies of these two deceased princes" (4.1.46-7), and when Faustus takes time out from duping the Horse-Courser to remark that he is a man "condemn'd to die" (4.2.33).

²⁴ Michael Neill discusses anxiety surrounding *mors improvisa*, and the extent to which it was seen as evidencing spiritual failure (*Issues of Death*, 18, 34-5). Some representatively lurid monitory examples can be found in Perkins' "A Salve for a Sicke Man," 160-1.

²⁵ For instance, see *Crafte and Knowledge For to Dye Well* on “complacence” and “disperacion” (5, 7).

²⁶ For an example of the reactive role given to the *moriens*, see *Crafte and Knowledge For to Dye Well*, 9. Both Erasmus’s *Preparatione to Deathe* and Robert Bellarmine’s *Art of Dying* specifically advise against engaging in religious disputation on the deathbed. See Erasmus, 61; Bellarmine, 260. Some Protestant texts aimed at spiritually sophisticated audiences expect the *moriens* to show more initiative. For example, William Perkins in *A Salve for a Sicke Man* complains of “a notorious fault that is very common in this age, and that is this, men now a dayes are so farre from reuing their faith and repentance, that, when they lie sick and are drawing toward death, they must bee catechized in the doctrine of doctrine of faith and repentance as if they had bene but of late receiued into the church” (145). However, Perkins still stresses the importance of theologically sophisticated and engaged visitors at the deathbed (146).

²⁷ John Stachniewski, *The Persecutory Imagination : English Puritanism and the Literature of Religious Despair* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991), 316.

²⁸ Augustine speaks of the fate of the damned in these terms: “*Illa est enim gravior et omnium malorum pessima, quae non fit separatione animae et corporis, sed in aeternam poenam potius utriusque complexu. Ibi e contrario non erunt homines ante mortem atque post mortem, sed semper in morte, ac per hoc numquam viventes, numquam mortui, sed sine fine morientes. Numquam enim erit homini peius in morte quam ubi erit mor ipsa sine morte.*” [For the death that is effected, not by the separation of soul and body, but rather by the union of both for eternal punishment is more serious and the worst of evils. There, conversely, men will not be in a state before death or after death but always in death, and for this reason never living, never dead, but endlessly dying. Indeed, man will never be worse off in death than where death itself will be deathless.] *City of God Against the Pagans*, ed. & trans. Philip Levine, Loeb Classical Library 414 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998), XIII.11.

²⁹ Troni Grande argues that dilation of this kind is a touchstone of Marlowe’s poetics in *Marlovian Tragedy: the Play of Dilation* (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 1999).

³⁰ Paul Whitfield White, *Theatre and Reformation: Protestantism, Patronage, and Playing in Tudor England*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 166.

MOURNER, *MORIENS* OR MARTYR? MIMETIC DEATH AS POLITICAL STRATEGY IN *RICHARD II*

In the last chapter, I noted the parodic relationship that dramatic representations of dying badly often have to good deaths and to the Passion, and argued that Marlowe exploits this resemblance in order to explore the possibilities for human agency in a Protestant belief system. Predestinarian theology opens up a gap between lived human experience and the heavenly determination of who is saved and who is damned. Though a belief that salvation through works is impossible can generate feelings of powerlessness and ultimately despair, Marlowe's Faustus strives to locate a limited sphere in which human action might nevertheless be viable by cultivating a practice of dying badly. As part of this effort, Faustus blasphemously imitates postures of repentance and Christ-like self-sacrifice. Significantly, his parodies occur before, and more frequently than, the good models upon which they are based. Parodies based on a missing original become separable from that original, even autonomous, and so tentatively suggest possibilities for human agency in the absence of God.

In *Richard II*, Shakespeare conducts a more extensive exploration of the forms of agency made possible by imitative dying practices – especially those based on absent or occluded originals. As the play reveals, adducing and following examples is both a strategy for identifying replicable instances of a norm and a practice of selection that tends to focus on the noteworthy. Though the example is

frequently defined against the exception, in practice the distinction between the two scarcely holds. Moreover, examples occupy a middle place between narrative and precept. Though by definition they are introduced to illustrate a general rule, they frequently have a narrative gravity of their own that threatens to exceed and distort the point that they are cited to prove.¹ Characters' responses to exemplary deaths in *Richard II* illustrate a particularly fractious relationship to past models. While some sort of mimetic approach to Christ in death appears a necessary part of Christian devotion, Shakespeare frequently marks imitative practices as extreme and problematic within the play. Saints and martyrs are at once ideal mediators and models for good deaths in the tradition of *Imitatio Christi* and practitioners of potentially perverse corruptions of *ars moriendi* who can be aligned with suicide and with unchristian forms of desire.

Moreover, this problematic has political and material consequences because imitative dying is understood as a historically situated practice. Characters in *Richard II* approach model deaths with an eye to their theological rationales and also to their psychological, social and political utility. By modeling approaches to death on past examples, they hope to control their own spiritual fates in accordance with historically particularized doctrinal beliefs while also intervening in the fate of the nation and the political sphere. *Richard II* displays greater historical sensibility than *Doctor Faustus*, drawing upon understandings of dying that represent a range of doctrinal and temporal positions and exploiting dissonances between them. The fourteenth century setting of *Richard II* and explicit references to Catholic beliefs and practices evoke a medieval religious and ritual culture that has no analogue in

Marlowe's play. At the same time, though, Shakespeare is deeply interested in the consequences of the passing of such a culture for subsequent understandings of mimesis and constructions of political power. Protestant practices of dying therefore also become important for understanding Richard's attempts to assert political relevance after his deposition. Finally, the play complicates any sense of a linear movement from one era to another by staging conflicts between different historical sensibilities and making productive use of anachronism. To understand these conflicts, the audience is required to inhabit anamorphic perspectives as they entertain different, incompatible understandings of mimetic dying. In doing so, they become complicit in potentially excessive or transgressive forms of imitation and in the political uses to which these may be put.

In tracing how characters in *Richard II* use imitative practices of dying politically, I put pressure on accounts of the play that read it as a linear narrative of disenchantment or secularization.² If the play does contain such a narrative, it also contains an account of how such narratives are constructed for specific political ends out of material that may run entirely counter to them and that may continue to haunt them in unwelcome ways. I draw attention to problems with how many accounts of the play, and of early modern drama more generally, have blurred differences between mourning and dying, or between memorialization and *ars moriendi*. These readings, I suggest, can be anachronistic and also tend to reduce relations to the past to nostalgia. In fact, in the play's hauntings and imitative practices of dying, self and other converge in embodiments that blur distinctions between death and life, and past and present. Moreover, these impersonations have

an affinity with theatrical mimetic performance. By dramatizing such embodiments, Shakespeare encourages us to think about the mechanisms through which such imitative strategies function, and the factors that might allow them to have political traction inside and outside the theater.

I.

In *Richard II*, concern with imitative dying practices emerges gradually out of a background awareness of mortality. Richard starts to think seriously about death when he returns from Ireland and learns that his troops have dispersed, leaving him with no way to put down Bullingbrook's rebellion. His reflections on his own mortality manifest the despair that leads him to assume the kingdom is already irretrievably lost and to anticipate, or even desire, his own end.³ However, they also lead him to locate a sort of autonomous agency in dying that might afford him some political influence. His speech therefore becomes a way to work through different understandings of dying as an existential inevitability, as a personal practice to be performed more or less willingly, or as a political fact with implications for how sovereignty is theorized.

Richard imagines the approach to death in order to record his losses, but also to reckon up what remains to him:

Let's choose executors and talk of wills.

And yet not so, for what can we bequeath

Save our deposèd bodies to the ground?

Our lands, our lives and all are Bullingbrook's,

And nothing can we call our own but death,

And that small model of the barren earth

Which serves as paste and cover to our bones.⁴

His speech acknowledges a significant transfer of power from Richard's party to Bullingbrook's. Bullingbrook has won "Our lands, our lives and all," and so assumed control of the persons and possessions that had previously been Richard's.

Additionally, Richard's claim that he and the others cannot choose executors or talk of wills, since there is nothing left to bequeath, implies that the usurpation has the effect of removing Richard from the legal and economic systems through which ownership is understood. The speech, therefore, records a conveyance of sovereignty, of the power to shape the very forms through which political and economic power can be seen and exercised.

Yet in the process of articulating this loss, Richard also identifies a residuum that he retains: "our deposèd bodies... death, /And that small model of the barren earth /That serves as paste and cover to our bones." This remainder is more substantial than it might at first appear. Andrew Gurr suggests that the primary meaning of "model" is "the outline of the body in the grave covering" after the flesh has decomposed.⁵ But the word can also be understood to refer to the body itself, modeled out of Adamic clay in God's image. Richard exploits the overlap between these two senses. His speech is a reminder that living humans already carry their graves with them, in the form of the flesh that will return to dust and become part of the earth that covers their bones. Moreover, this image is not only an example of *memento mori*. Because it immediately follows the enumeration of the things Bullingbrook owns, it suggests a counterpoise; Bullingbrook may control our lives,

but our deaths remain a potentially significant sphere of autonomy. Richard can still belong to himself in and through death, and in this moment he understands dying in an expansive sense that allows him to assert ownership of his body and the time that remains to it.

Richard next considers the precedents for his position, looking for examples he can learn from:

For God's sake let us sit upon the ground
And tell sad stories of the death of kings,
How some have been deposed, some slain in war,
Some haunted by the ghosts they have deposed,
Some poisoned by their wives, some sleeping killed,
All murdered. (3.2.155-60)

Again, Richard's outburst primarily conveys a newfound awareness of the precarity of his situation, which he strives to place in perspective by considering the universal fact of mortality. He sees himself as a member of a larger class, characterized by its vulnerability.⁶ Not only are the kings he imagines passive victims, "All murdered," but as Richard's catalogue progresses, the ways in which they are murdered imply a progressively greater attenuation of agency even during their lifetimes. Kings involved in active political struggles (deposed or slain in war) are replaced by those who fail to control their domestic economies (poisoned by their wives) and finally by those exhibiting a form of life that resembles death in its insensibility (sleeping killed).⁷ The list moves inwards from the kingdom to the self, with each new instance revealing that the boundaries that are supposed to define sovereignty,

autonomous agency and safety will not hold. The inevitability of mortality at an existential level validates a pessimistic philosophy of kingship as purely epiphenomenal.

Within this list, the kings “haunted by the ghosts they have deposed” stand out. On one level, they represent another reconfiguration of the scope of kingly autonomy; even rulers who appear to have triumphed politically find themselves vulnerable to hauntings that result in their deaths. But the image also anticipates the primary means by which Richard will ultimately attack Bullingbrook. The ghost of King Richard haunts Bullingbrook in a number of ways – during Richard’s life, through his destabilizing persistence even after his deposition, and after his death, as a rallying point for rebels through the rest of the second tetralogy. By evoking ghosts, Richard once again identifies the vulnerability that mortality exposes in kings, but then discovers a form of agency in that very weakness, in the fact that a ghost can be parasitic on the new monarch. The ghost-kings recall the universal experience of death and use this to achieve specific political ends. Significantly, their power is derived from the iterability of postures of dying and the opportunity this offers for embodied imitation. The *Oxford English Dictionary* lists this passage as the earliest example of haunting in the sense of “to be subject to the visits and molestation of disembodied spirits.”⁸ Older understandings of the word “haunt,” which may well still resonate in the speech, are “to resort to frequently or habitually; to frequent or be much about (a place)” and “to practice habitually, frequently or regularly.”⁹ Haunting taken in these senses merges the usurper with the king he has deposed by implying that the ghost is in some ways inhabiting the

new king or practicing at being the new king. Haunting appears to be successful in part because it is a strategy of occupying someone's identity or of habitually impersonating them.

Furthermore, Richard goes on to suggest that such impersonation may have a more fundamental relationship to dying. Richard's list of murdered kings culminates in the realization that he himself is haunted (as in inhabited and practiced) by a sovereign whose rights he has attempted to usurp – King Death:

For within the hollow crown
That rounds the mortal temples of a king
Keeps Death his court, and there the antic sits
Scoffing his state and grinning at his pomp,
Allowing him a breath, a little scene
To monarchise, be feared and kill with looks,
Infusing him with self and vain conceit
As if this flesh which walls about our life
Were brass impregnable, and humoured thus
Comes at the last and with a little pin
Bores through his castle wall and farewell king! (3.2.160-70)

Richard here evokes two conventional personifications of Death—as monarch in triumph over humanity and as antic fool—and then considers how they relate to one another and to his own position.¹⁰ Zenon Luis-Martinez observes that one way of understanding the Death who resides within Richard's mortal temples is as the skull existing under his skin. For Luis-Martinez, the confusing topography of the

image, where “The King’s head and death’s head are coextensive opposites” is an instance of the play’s frequent recourse to anamorphic perspectives as figures for human powerlessness in the face of history, for the impossibility of rightly gazing on events in a manner that might make them controllable.¹¹ Yet if the image encourages the audience to strobe between the king’s head and the skull, the tyrant and the martyr, for Richard, it also records an experience of habitation, or of him himself becoming an anamorphosis. Richard discovers himself to be Death. His language emphasizes permeability and mutual constitution over abrupt shifts of direction. The referent behind the pronouns governing “his state” and “his pomp” is ambiguous, reflecting the shared or shifting governance of Death-as-king and King-as-death. Moreover, Death has apparently infused the king “with self and vain conceit.” Though the primary sense of the phrase is that Death’s temporary forbearance has allowed Richard to develop a vain belief in his own inviolability, it also suggests that Richard’s self has in some way been constituted through his permeation by death. The image stages a clash between understandings of dying as a political fact that a theory of sovereignty must accommodate and as an existential state. The image suggests the interpenetration of monarch and *moriens* that entails both (viewed rightly) the inevitable limitation to sovereign power, and (if eyed awry) an opportunity to exercise non-sovereign power through dying.

But if Richard’s image implies there might be a political payoff to the practice of dying, it also indicates energies and desires involved in excess of any such political instrumentalization. In view of Richard’s later words and actions, it is striking that he refers to Death as an “antic.” Richard’s association of Death with the

figure of the fool evokes the parodic postures assumed by the skeletons in the dance of death. It is these scoffing Deaths whom Richard most typically imitates. At Flint Castle and during the deposition scene, he behaves foolishly for strategic reasons, attempting to destabilize Bullingbrook in part by mocking royal ceremony.¹² But the image of Richard infused by Death the fool also marks his approach to dying as aberrant, as something that goes beyond a mournful recognition that death is inevitable to take “grinning” pleasure in the prospect.

All of which is to say that though Richard’s outburst in Act 3 Scene 2 does function as a despairing lamentation for what has been lost, it also fitfully gestures towards an embodied practice of dying conceived as a form of political resistance or as something to be desired for its own sake. At this point in the play, this practice is not Christianized. Richard’s lament reverses his earlier confidence in divine support. He begins his discussion of death with the command “Of comfort no man speak” (3.2.144). Though Richard is talking directly to Aumerle, who has been inquiring after the troops York might be able to provide, his rejection of comfort also forecloses on religious consolation. Instead of a transcendent providence, Richard discovers in mortality an immanent negative infinity already inside himself. The overall mood is that of the *Trauerspiel*.

But over the course of the speech, Richard starts to think about dying as involving interpersonal relations, imitation or impersonation – and these conceptions can easily be refigured in Christian terms. Later, Richard increasingly approaches death as a practice of *Imitatio Christi* through which he hopes to control both his spiritual and political fate. Richard associates himself with Christ as a

moriens, partly to garner sympathy as a victim of treacherous betrayal, but also to evoke a providentialist view of history that would seem to promise the punishment of Bullingbrook. Under such a providence, a good Christian death can bring about desirable political outcomes; Richard can identify and exploit a link between his person, heaven and the fate of the nation that survives Bullingbrook's usurpation. Within the play, Carlisle provides the strongest example of such a retributive understanding of providentialist history when he prophesizes that as a result of Richard's deposition, "Disorder, horror, fear and mutiny / Shall here inhabit, and this land be called / The field of Golgotha and dead men's skulls" (4.1.142-44). Notably, the reference to Golgotha implies that providence takes effect because Richard as a suffering individual has a loosely typological relationship to Christ.

This, at any rate, is the hope. However, the play as a whole is more skeptical about the compatibility of Richard's spiritual practice and political agenda. As I have argued, Richard's practice of mimetic dying first develops when he feels entirely abandoned by heaven and is thrown back on his degraded, mortal body as the only possible sphere of autonomous action. Though his imitations attempt to uncover a new link to the divine, his practice never conclusively rises above its origins in the purely earthy. Moreover, his association with Christ as *moriens* is potentially in conflict with his association with Christ as monarch. As Ernst Kantorwicz has famously argued, Richard's imitation of Christ is bound up with his understanding of the nature of monarchy, with the conception of the double-bodied sovereign modeled on Christ's dual nature as God and man.¹³ This sovereign analogy emphasizes Richard and Christ's exceptionality as figures of the divine on earth, in a

way that is hard to reconcile with the humility necessary for a practice of *ars moriendi*. Consequently, Richard's efforts to present himself as a type of Christ often look insincere in their concern with worldly things and blasphemous in their excess. Political and spiritual aspirations and private despair all rub against one another uneasily.

Even Richard himself is well aware of the problem. He alternates apparently sincere attempts to model his behavior on Christ with intimations that he in fact considers himself to be a Judas – a traitor and a suicide – and also evokes the reprobate character of Marlowe's Faustus. Deliberate impersonations of exemplary figures are balanced by unconscious, untimely impersonations of unwelcome others. These raise the question of who is producing whom. Are imitative deaths possible because a *moriens* is capable of mimicking an example, or because the dead (or heavenly, diabolical or authorial forces using the dead) make themselves felt through the living? Is the imitative death a site of spiritual agency that reaches into the political sphere, of the more or less conscious release of desires in excess of the model, or of the evacuation of the self now haunted by the other?

II.

In proposing to imitate the death of Christ or of other exemplary figures, Richard is engaging with a Christian practice that has a long, complex and contentious intellectual history. Christianity starts with a death that must be imitated yet that is impossible to imitate adequately. The Son of God's sacrifice of himself for the sake of humanity replaces the old law with the new and founds the Church. The event of the Crucifixion marks a fundamental shift in the relationship

between the divine and the human. But if the foundational importance of Christ's death is clear, the response that it demands from believers is less so. In several places, the Bible indicates that imitation is necessary. In the Gospel according to Mark, Christ tells his listeners "Whosoever will follow me, let him forsake himself, and take up his cross, and follow me. For whosoever will save his life, shall lose it, but whosoever shall lose his life for my sake and the Gospel's, he shall save it."¹⁴ Paul in the Letter to the Romans assures Christians "if we be planted with him to the similitude of his death, even so shall we be *to the similitude* of his resurrection."¹⁵ In both instances, the identities of Christ and the imitator appear to converge at the moment of death, which through Christ becomes resurrection. Salvific Christian imitation of the Passion holds out the possibility that, contra Heidegger, death is relational; Christ can die for the good Christian so that in that good Christian's dying, he or she is with Christ.¹⁶

But to say that a Christian should imitate Christ is not to say how this imitation should be carried out. Since Christ is both man and God, the Passion is both a necessary model and a sacrifice of so great a magnitude that any human attempt to comprehend or appreciate it, much less to emulate it, will inevitably fall far short. On different occasions, Paul suggests different ways to proceed. In the First Letter to the Corinthians, he states, "Be ye followers of me, even as I am of Christ," suggesting that Christ is best imitated through a uniquely spiritually privileged human mediator.¹⁷ In Ephesians, by contrast, he asks his readers to be "followers of God" directly.¹⁸ Jerome suggests that these contrary precepts may reflect different levels of spiritual development at Corinth and at Ephesus. While the

Corinthians “could not instantaneously become imitators of Christ,” the Ephesians already had revelations of “great mysteries” that enabled them to imitate God directly.¹⁹ Such an interpretation implies that though the requirement to imitate the Passion is universal, the proper way to do so may vary according to the circumstances of the imitating person in what becomes a complex negotiation between the individual, his or her social context, and the divine.

One historically significant strategy for imitating Christ is represented by the Catholic tradition of martyred saints, who strive to recreate the Crucifixion as literally as possible, but in doing so may display forms of desire and enjoyment that threaten to pervert their model. True martyrdom constitutes a theologically successful imitation of Christ when it results in entry into heaven.²⁰ Martyrs resemble Christ in their willingness to die for faith and salvation, and frequently also in the circumstances of their deaths. The number of crucifixions recorded in the *Golden Legend* is striking. However, in functioning as imitations of the Passion, some martyrdoms may also exhibit unchristlike forms of desire and enjoyment. In the account of the Life of Saint Peter the Apostle in the *Golden Legend*, for example, Peter has a prophetic vision that leads him to anticipate his martyrdom:

And when he came to the gate, as, Leo witnesseth, which is called Sancta Maria ad passus, he met Jesu Christ coming against him, and Peter said to him: Lord, whither goest thou? And he said to him: I go to Rome for to be crucified again, and Peter demanded him: Lord, shalt thou be crucified again, And he said: Yea, and Peter said then: Lord, I shall return again then for to be

crucified with thee. This said, our Lord ascended into heaven, Peter beholding it, which wept sore.²¹

In this vision, Peter's crucifixion is not demanded or even prophesized by Christ, but is first suggested and then actively pursued by Peter himself as a way of being "with thee," as an act of emulation that will bring him to the God by whom he feels abandoned. Christ does not respond to Peter's proposal or give it divine sanction. Instead he simply ascends to heaven, leaving Peter to weep for him alone. Peter's tears recall the Gospel account of his bitter weeping after belatedly recognizing that, as prophesized, he has denied Jesus three times.²² The passage therefore invokes Peter at his most fallen. It marks his desire for Christ as human and, in evoking a previous denial, as self-divided. Imitative martyrdom in this instance is presented as a gambit to recover a lost object of love, but also recalls the rejection of that object. The episode suggests that the imitative impulse behind martyrdom may be a fallen one.

Yet though the vision points out the fundamental gap between the frail, desiring human and the divine, it also holds out the hope that martyrdom could nevertheless be an occasion of equivalence and even union between God and humanity. Peter wishes to be with Christ not after his martyrdom, but during his martyrdom. And Christ does state that he is traveling to Rome "to be crucified again." This mystical second crucifixion will at the least mirror Peter's, and even could be understood as being Peter's. Christ gets crucified again when Peter recreates him by reenacting the postures of the Crucifixion. Taken as a whole, the vision expresses both a fallen desire for the God who Peter feels has abandoned him,

and a fantasy that this abandonment can be overcome through martyrdom in which being with Christ becomes being as Christ.

Peter's actual martyrdom, however, implies a different economy. His death is iconographically distinguished from Christ's by his choice to be crucified on an upside-down Petrine cross:

Peter said thus: Lord, I have desired much to follow thee, but to be crucified upright I have not usurped, thou art always rightful, high and sovereign, and we be sons of the first man which have the head inclined to the earth, of whom the fall signifieth the form of the generation human. Also we be born that we be seen inclined to the earth by effect, and the condition is changed for the world weeneth that such thing is good, which is evil and bad.²³

Peter's words emphasize the absolute hierarchical distinction between himself and Christ, and the presumption that usurping the postures of the Crucifixion too exactly would entail. However, there is a sense in which Peter, by putting himself in a position more abject than Christ's, looks as though he is attempting to outdo his model. The Crucifixion is meant to stand as an unsurpassable example of suffering, during which the Son of God willingly subjects himself to unprecedented degradation. By placing himself below Christ in an iconic display of abjection, Peter arguably attempts to go further than Christ, or indulges desires that are parasitic on the act of imitation but have nothing to do with it. He explicitly marks his inverted Crucifixion as a worldly falling off from Christ, and in doing so, opens up a space in which he can on some level take pleasure in this falling off.

And in this, Peter is not alone. The lives of many Catholic martyrs end in displays of suffering that surpass the Passion in extremity, and moreover constitute excessive imitations of the misfortunes of other martyrs. For example, the *Golden Legend* suggests that Saint Bartholomew was crucified, flayed and beheaded “for to have greater torment.”²⁴ And such torments can be extended almost indefinitely. Eamon Duffy cites Saint Erasmus as “the classic example here. One late medieval English account of his passion lists fifty-two separate tortures, from being scourged with brambles and boiled in oil to having his guts wound out with a windlass and the cavity so created filled with salt.”²⁵ Martyrdom as it appears in medieval hagiography can start to look like a competitive masochistic and exhibitionist practice in which Christ is rapidly far outstripped.²⁶ It functions as a practice of imitative dying that aims to bring the martyr to Christ, but it also provides opportunities to express desires that threaten to pervert or overwhelm the religious imitation. The hagiographies emphasize the exceptional status of martyrdom, and the ever more elaborate, tortured approaches to death found within them seem intended to reassert that exceptionality even as martyr narratives accumulate.

In consequence, accounts of martyrdom would appear to stand at odds with the *artes moriendi*. The arts of dying are primarily addressed to those dying of natural causes in ordinary surroundings, while martyrdoms are violent executions typically occurring in unusual circumstances. Moreover, the arts of dying generally strive to reassure their readers by reducing dying to a set of conventional, normative postures, and insisting that the ordinary death, through its very conformity to established practice, can be spiritually significant. As a result, the

genre seems opposed to the drive toward excess and exception found in much hagiography. Nevertheless, martyrs do appear in Catholic *artes moriendi*, where they are frequently evoked alongside Christ as exemplars and mediators for *morientes*.²⁷ And this creates a real potential for contradiction. Martyrs have an unstable place, both inside and outside of the tradition of dying well, since the intermediate position they are placed in, between the ordinary dying person and the divine, is scarcely consonant with their excessive qualities.

Martyrs and other saints are evoked in *artes moriendi* for two reasons. They can act as intercessors and can also provide more immediately relevant and less terrifyingly awesome exemplars than Christ for sickening and dying sinners. The *Crafte* advises a *moriens* to pray “deuoutely to all the apostelys, martyres, confessours, and virgynes, & specially to the seynt, the whyche he loued and worschyped moste specyally in hys helthe that they well helpe hym than in ys laste and moste need.”²⁸ As this quotation indicates, saintly assistance is frequently predicated on the identification of resemblances between the sick person and the saint. *The Miracles of Henry VI*, for example, discusses the miraculous vision of a sailor called Henry Walter, who, while suffering from gangrenous abdominal wounds, saw that “the holy martyr Erasmus (for whom he chanced to have a special devotion) lay near him, as if with the pain of his sufferings renewed, just as he is often represented in churches, being tortured [with disembowelment] by his executioners.”²⁹ Saint Erasmus becomes an appropriate model and intercessor because of Walter’s prior devotion and analogous physical condition. Rather than striving to attain an impossible resemblance to Christ, Walter approaches Erasmus

as Erasmus is also approaching him. Thomas Lupset's *The Waye of Dyenge Well* invokes Christian martyrs as exemplifying how faith in Christ can counter fear of death, and as precedents who should reassure ordinary believers confronting their mortality:

Whan it was proclaimied that who so euer wold saye he was christened he shulde cruelly be put to deth, there passed no daye without a great number of them that boldly spoke tho wordes of the which shoulde folowe so blouddye a slaughter. This was a manifest token that fear of death hadde no maner of place with our blessed martirs... the cause of this myrthe in so piteous martyrdoms was that this blessed men knewe howe Christe nother could nor wolde deceiue them, but that for theyr lyttel regarding of this lyfe they shoulde opteyne an other lyfe, where their ioy shuld neuer haue nother change, nor decrease, nor ende.

Therefore my good Walker, mystruste you not in Christe, whose doctryn the heuen and the erthe hath by innumerable miracles this many hundreth yeres approuyd and confyrmed to be trew.³⁰

However, it is clear that these examples are not in fact entirely reassuring or entirely amenable to conventional understandings of the good Christian approach to death. Saint Erasmus is invoked less to illustrate Christian patience than to reenact his pain as an iconic posture "as he is often represented in churches;" he models death as a celebration of physical sensation and display. The superficial similarity between him and Walter in fact points to a much more fundamental difference between the invisible, natural progress of gangrene and the spectacle of deliberate

torture. Lupset's *Waye of Dyenge Well* similarly has difficulty explaining how to relate the exceptional instances of martyrdom to the ordinary circumstances of Christian death. Moreover, the book attempts to graft a classical Stoic understanding of the good death onto the Christian tradition. In the process, Lupset saints start to look problematically similar to pagan suicides.³¹

After the Reformation, both confessions canvass more seriously the possibility that martyrdoms are excessive perversions, not ideal fulfillments, of *Imitatio Christi* that have no place in *ars moriendi*. Doctrinal disputes encourage debates about the relationship between martyrdom and sanctification. Both Catholics and Protestants label the heroes of the other side traitors, heretics and even suicides, so calling into question the status of martyrdom as an imitation of the Passion.³² Dying in a manner formally analogous to Christ or to previous martyrs is not enough. Some other marker of true faith is needed. Additionally, iconoclastic reformers frequently label the cults of the saints as idolatrous. The very intermediate position martyrs and other saints occupy between humanity and God, and their success at taking on some of the attributes of Christ in their deaths, makes their veneration suspicious.

The case of Thomas Becket illustrates these changes particularly starkly. Becket's cult at Canterbury was targeted early by Henry VIII for destruction because of Becket's status as a symbol of ecclesiastical resistance to monarchical control over church government.³³ A Royal Proclamation of 16 November 1538 redefined the political and religious significance of Becket's murder, stating that "Thos. Becket, sometime abp. of Canterbury, shall no longer be named a saint, as he was really a

rebel who fled the realm to France and to the bp. of Rome to procure the abrogation of wholesome laws, and was slain upon a rescue made with resistance to those who counselled him to leave his stubbornness.”³⁴ John Foxe repeats the claim that Becket is not a true martyr, and then goes on to criticize the manner in which he had been venerated. In particular he objects that:

[An] Antheme or Collect lately collected & primered in hys prayse, is blasphemous, and derogateth from the prayse of him, to whome al prayse onely and honor is due, where it is sayd.

Tu per Thomæ sanguinem quem pro te impendit,
Fac nos Christe scandere quò Thomas ascendit.

That is.

For the bloud of Thomas, which he for thee did spend,
Graunt vs (Christ) to climbe, where Tho. did ascend.

Wherin is a double lye containd: first, that he dyed for Christ. Secondly, that if he had so done, yet that his bloud could purchase heauen. Which thing, neyther Paul nor any of the apostles durst euer challenge to themselues. For if any mans bloud could bring vs to heauen, then the bloud of Christ was shed in vayne.³⁵

John Jewel cites the same collect as an example of Catholic idolaters seeking “*not onely* Intercession, *but also* Saluation in the *Bloude of Thomas*.”³⁶ The archbishop comes to stand for a bad, “stubborn” corruption of true martyrdom, and is associated with the usurpation of sovereign power and heavenly privilege.³⁷ Not only is Becket himself represented as a rebel, but the contemplation of his example

also appears to inspire rebellious thoughts against God in others. Becket's presumption against Henry II is hooked to the analogous presumption of his cult against the heavenly authority and exclusive exemplary position of Christ. The suggestion that the archbishop's martyrdom is exceptional, granting Becket a superior position in heaven, is in itself a sign that his veneration is external to appropriate Christian devotional practice. Significantly, the critique of Becket comes to focus particularly on his blood. What for the Catholics, at least in Foxe and Jewel's accounts, had been a symbol of Becket's saintliness and proximity to Christ is now merely an emission from the dying body that should put readers in mind of Becket's fleshy humanity. Tormented postures of martyrdom are no longer exemplary icons of saintliness, but suspicious displays of the physical body and its "stubborn" desires.

Nevertheless, for Protestants, as for Catholics, models of the good death were still important. Imitation of Christ remained a necessary devotional practice, and human exemplary actions could be useful as inspiration.³⁸ The difficulty was how to imitate appropriately. The 1580 translation of Thomas a Kempis's *Imitatio Christi* by Thomas Rogers addresses these problems explicitly and carefully, perhaps because Rogers feels the need to justify recommending a Catholic text on holy examples for Protestant use.³⁹ In an introductory epistle, Rogers discusses how to respond to Christ as an exemplar. He naturalizes mimetic behavior, saying "Who entereth into a due consideration of mans nature, shal easilie perceauce that most stranglie it is addicted vnto Imitation," and then identifies two appropriate sorts of examples for imitation: "one to be folowed and that both necessarilie, and alwaies, which is our Sauior Christ; the other but sometime and in some things, as are good men and

women, whether they be aliue or dead.”⁴⁰ Rogers first explains that the proper way to imitate other humans is to isolate their individual good characteristics or actions. This practice expands the exhortation in First Corinthians to follow Paul as he follows Christ into a more general principle of moral imitation.⁴¹

But to say that Christians should follow human models only to follow Christ is to recall Christ as the superior and universal example, so Rogers next considers how one should go about imitating him:

Therefore our Sauior is the example of vs to be folowed, and that alwaies, and necessarilie: alwaies, for that he was most perfectlie good; and necessarilie, because both himselfe, and his Apostles, haue commanded vs to do so. But here mistake me not, I beseech you. For albeit I saie our Sauior Christ is alwaies; yet do I not saie in al things: and though necessarilie to be folowed; yet not as he was God. For he fasted fourtie daies and fourtie nights... he restored sight to the blind; health to the sicke; to the dead life; and manie other miracles by the almightie power of his Godhead he wrought, which are vnimitable (as I maie saie) of mortal man. In somuch that they offend greatlie, whether they do it of superstition, as Papists; or of meere zeale, as did the God of Norweigh, who dare enterprise to imitate our Sauior in anie thing which he did miraculously as a God.⁴²

The final sentence of this passage makes clear that one of Rogers’ motivations is to stake out distinctions between his position, Catholic practice and the behavior of ascetic zealots.⁴³ He does so by arguing his opponents have either misrecognized the distinction between Christ’s godlike and manlike behavior, or are responding to

that distinction inappropriately.⁴⁴ This claim turns on a split within Christ between what he does as God and as man, which Rogers wants to present as clear and self-evident, but which rapidly generates difficulties. Rogers describes the actions of God as “unimitable.” The word implies both that godlike behavior is impossible to imitate, and that it should not be imitated. The examples Rogers gives of raising the dead and curing the sick suggest the former sense, until we learn that Catholics and “the God of Norweigh” have in fact managed some sort of inappropriate imitation. Notably, the Catholic and ascetic excesses that Rogers condemns seem of a piece with the excessive aspects of martyrdom that I have been discussing. The behavior that is rejected as only appropriate to God is also the behavior that uses religious forms to release irreligious desires and energies; in inimitable behavior, the divine and the perverse touch.

Though Rogers does not discuss the problem, the Passion is the most difficult instance for asserting such distinctions between God and man. Christ’s death fully realizes his assumption of human mortality. However, it is not itself like the death of a human. Theologians from Augustine onward draw on John 10:18 (“No man taketh [my life] from me, but I lay it down of myself. I have power to lay it down, and have power to take it again”) to argue that Christ died voluntarily.⁴⁵ He willingly took on human mortality, and even performed an act that, if it is understood as chosen, looks rather like a suicide, but is in fact the fulfillment of God’s plan rather than a despairing rejection of it.⁴⁶ Moreover, Christ’s willingness to suffer degradation and death during the Passion ultimately lays the groundwork for his resurrection. His death, precisely because it recreates a human experience of abjection, refigures the

law governing relationships between the human and the divine in a manner that certainly cannot be imitated. Except that, as noted above, the scriptures insist that it must be, because it is what allows believing Christians to triumph over death through union with Christ. Though Protestant divines like Rogers imply that Christ, when carefully considered, can supply iterable examples for human conduct, and though the writers of *artes moriendi* implicitly agree when they advocate the imitation of Christ on the deathbed, imitation of the Passion threatens to recall the excessive postures of the Catholic martyrs or to become an outlet for desires incompatible with Christian patience in the face of death.

My contention is that these debates about how to imitate holy examples in death resonate in *Richard II*. Differences between characters' political objectives, along with their understandings of sovereignty and other forms of power, are mapped onto different Catholic and Protestant conceptions of which figures make appropriate models to imitate while dying and of how such imitations should be carried out. Richard strives to exploit a link between individual eschatology and universal eschatology, and hopes that by dying well in a manner that affirms divine involvement in human fate, he can align himself with a providentialist ordering of history through which Bullingbrook will be punished for his usurpation and he himself might even achieve some sort of resurrection. However, his evocations of suicides and martyrs also imply a perverse desire to die badly, and the play intimates that the habitation of such exemplary bad deaths may also have political consequences, creating revenants that persist to pollute the kingdom. Bullingbrook too is cognizant of good and bad past models in the arrangements he makes for

Richard's deposition and assassination and is similarly concerned both with the spiritual and political ramifications of different forms of mimetic dying. The precise precedents characters evoke when the approach death resonate against one another in complex, untimely ways, which trouble critical narratives that read the play as depicting the supersession of a medieval worldview with a disenchanted renaissance one. Anachronisms and clashes between different, historically specific understandings of what an appropriate model would be figure the incompatibilities between characters' heavenly and earthly objectives, and also the difficulty of separating the exemplary, the exceptional and the excessive. Moreover, anachronism in particular encourages the audience to consider its own stance with relation to the action and its own complicity in enabling or recognizing forms of mimetic dying with potentially transgressive spiritual or political consequences.

III.

Richard announces his project of strategic Christian *ars moriendi* when he ostentatiously exchanges the trappings of monarchy and the kingdom for the trappings of Catholic devotion and the grave:

I'll give my jewels for a set of beads,
My gorgeous palace for a hermitage,
My gay apparel for an almsman's gown,
My figured goblets for a dish of wood,
My scepter for a palmer's walking staff,
My subjects for a pair of carved saints,
And my large kingdom for a little grave,

A little, little grave, an obscure grave. (3.3.147-54)

The speech asserts a parallel between the symbolic, political and religious economies of sovereignty and of *ars moriendi*. Richard implies that just as ceremonial and symbolic objects emblemize the king's control of the kingdom, so devotional objects emblemize the penitent's orientation towards death. However, the practical and spiritual implications of this resemblance are ambiguous. Richard's words take the form of a gesture of *contemptus mundi* but are almost certainly in bad faith. Rather than turning his mind from worldly concerns to heavenly ones, he intends to force Bullingbrook to acknowledge the extent of his ambitions, and the loss these will entail for Richard. The speech therefore seems like a cynical perversion of a dying well and raises the problem of whether a devotional practice can be compatible with a political agenda.

Richard himself seems to recognize his behavior may in fact be a blasphemous inversion of a proper stance towards death in the alternative he suggests to the little grave:

Or I'll be buried in the king's highway
Some way of common trade, where subjects' feet
May hourly trample on their sovereign's head;
For on my heart they tread now whilst I live,
And buried once, why not upon my head? (3.3.155-59).

The highway was traditionally the burial place for suicides. Barry Nass suggests Richard is obliquely acknowledging that the death he is cultivating for himself may be an action of despair. Acquiescing to Bullingbrook's rule is a rejection of God's gift

and destruction of the body politic akin to suicide.⁴⁷ But this imagined bad death should not only be read for what it reveals about Richard's perception of his spiritual state; Richard is also thinking about how a practice of dying badly might give him political traction. Suicides are buried on highways with stakes through their hearts because they (like murder victims) are seen as likely to return to haunt the living. The tread of passersby keeps the revenant under the ground.⁴⁸ Richard's complaint that his subjects trample on his heart conflates staking and burial and implies that he is already in the position of a ghost polluting Bullingbrook's commonwealth, while his anticipation of them trampling on his head anticipates a world turned upside-down, a breakdown of political hierarchy in the wake of his death. The image draws out a parallel between king and malevolent spirit to balance the earlier parallel between king and heaven-bound penitent. Richard's imagined degradation as a suicide indicates despair but also hints at energies released through dying badly that are exceptional and antagonistic to the "way of common trade," and so resemble sovereignty.

In these two contrary images, then, Richard lays out a field in which to understand his actions: on one axis he moves between identities of holy penitent and reprobate suicide, and on another, between postures of spiritual resignation and political action. And it is within this field that we need to understand his mimetic practices. The debates I outlined above over how to imitate Christ and other exemplary figures such as martyrs appropriately mean that strategies of impersonation can suggest any of these positions. In particular, and despite Shakespeare's strong, explicit evocation of a Catholic religious framework, Richard's

practice of *Imitatio Christi* is haunted by anxieties about appropriate forms of imitation that resemble the concerns of Protestant thinkers such as Thomas Rogers, more closely than they do pre-Reformation assumptions. The play continually suggests that Richard's imitations are, in Rogers' terms, impossible, superstitious or excessively zealous.

Richard's most sustained evocation of Christ occurs during his deposition. Richard's stage management of the action in this scene and his invention of a ritual of abdication has met with wildly divergent critical responses. For Walter Pater and Kantorowicz, the abdication is a serious ceremony, an act that "leaves the spectator breathless. It is a scene of sacramental solemnity, since the ecclesiastical ritual of undoing the effects of consecration is not less solemn or of less weight than the ritual which has built up the sacramental dignity."⁴⁹ Kantorowicz sees the Christlike postures Richard adopts as significant expressions of the magnitude of the event of deconsecrating a king. Other critics, however, are inclined to read the scene as a falling away from true ritual. For Alexander Leggatt, Richard "does more than violate ceremony; he perverts it, even parodies it... He turns ceremony into a theatrical trick to make his audience feel uncomfortable, and so dramatizes their complicity."⁵⁰ Robert M. Schuler claims Richard's coronation goes beyond parody to become a blasphemous, "demonic" inversion of true Christian ritual.⁵¹ In fact, Richard's behavior deliberately encourages such divergent readings. Richard alternately seems to take the resemblance seriously and to treat it as a joke or a presumption. The strategies through which he manages his onstage audience bring

questions of how such imitations work, what desires they fulfill, and for whom they are performed, to the foreground.

Richard's explicit self-identification with Christ begins when he looks at the assembled peers and evokes Judas's betrayal:

Yet I well remember

The favors of these men. Were they not mine?

Did they not sometime cry 'All hail' to me?

So Judas did to Christ, but he in twelve

Found truth in all but one, I in twelve thousand none. (4.1.167-71)

On the surface, Richard's understanding of his relation to the Passion is self-aggrandizing, even blasphemous. Richard is not just imitating Christ. Like the martyred saints in the *Golden Legend* seen from a Protestant perspective, he seems to be trying to outdo Christ, insisting he has experienced a greater level of suffering and betrayal than the archetype of undeserved victimization. Moreover, Richard is doing so in order to absolve himself of responsibility for his weak rule, and to place the blame entirely on the nobles.

But to identify this moment as instantiating bad, blasphemous or excessive identification with Christ is only to beg the question of what would make a practice of *Imitatio Christi* appropriate, and Richard does in fact implicitly ask this question and bring those observing him onstage to endorse his impersonation. He takes the occasion for the comparison from the appearance of "these men," the peers around him who have become complicit in Bullingbook's *coup d'état*. If he is inappropriately and excessively imitating Christ, he implies, it is only because they are

inappropriately and excessively imitating Judas. By alluding to his listeners, Richard suggests that the resemblance between himself and Christ is a collective creation, and any blame for its potentially blasphemous nature is dispersed. The listeners' silence implies their acquiescence to this narrative, or at best shifts them into another category of compromised observers of the Passion – they are Pilates who “Have here delivered me to my sour cross /And water cannot wash away your sin” (4.1.239-41).

In exploiting the silence of his auditors, Richard is being somewhat disingenuous, since he has assumed a rhetorical stance in this speech designed to shut out any other speaker. Richard characteristically asserts power by generating and drawing attention to embarrassing situations. Here and elsewhere, he proves himself a master at provoking increasing discomfort in his listeners, who find themselves unable to engage with him because they can neither admit nor reject the core assumptions upon which his words are predicated. In this instance, he makes an ostentatious show of calling for others to affirm or deny his speech when he says “God save the king! Will no man say Amen?” (4.1.172). But, as Richard must know, he is asking an impossible question, and one that condemns its hearers even if they ignore it. Because the identity of the true king is unclear, any attempt to respond is potentially either treasonous or blasphemous. At the same time, refusal to respond is also potentially treasonous or blasphemous. The silence of the peers gives Richard the authority to continue to be “both priest and clerk,” and to speak for and assign roles in a biblical reenactment to everyone present at his deposition (4.1.173). Earlier, I suggested that Richard’s understood himself an anamorphic object

through his conceit of death as the skull under the skin. Now, he creates a similarly paradoxical image, figuring himself both as the king to be saved and the thing the king must be saved from, but does so for an identified set of viewers. The peers must be both outside and inside of the tableau, distanced enough from Richard's Christlike posture that their silent assent to it can appear objective, and near enough to be tainted by the association with Judas. In this they resemble viewers of an anamorphic image, who must impossibly occupy two perspectives, one head on and the other at such an oblique angle that they almost merge into the picture plane.⁵²

After comparing himself to Christ upon his entrance into Bullingbrook's presence, and gaining at least silent acquiescence to the comparison, Richard can assume that his subsequent actions will continue to be read typologically in relation to the Passion. The most significant of these actions is his voluntary surrender of power. Many critics have argued that the abdication is incompatible with a political philosophy of divine right. In giving up his crown, Richard implicitly agrees that sovereign power is the property of those who "know the strong'st and surest way to get," rather than something divinely ordained (3.3.200). Either there is no heavenly interest in the monarchy, or Richard is rejecting the divine trust placed in him in an act akin to a despairing suicide or a denial of God. The abdication would seem to confirm the failure of Richard's attempts to present himself as an analogue of Christ, or even to constitute a willing turn away from Christ.

However, the Passion also provides a precedent for Richard to give up his power in one sense while still retaining it in another. By creating his own deposition ceremony, he evokes Christ's death as a voluntary action that enables his

resurrection. Thus, he imitates Christ in order to generate an art of dying, but one that pointedly makes him an exception to the usual practice of *ars moriendi* because it attempts to recreate the Godlike qualities of the model. Richard submits to humiliation and gives up his crown to Bullingbrook in a way that will enable him to reclaim it in some sense later on. His orchestration of the ceremony of abdication becomes a way of asserting a difference in kind between his own divinely sanctioned sovereign right and the power Bullingbrook derives from popularity and military force. Through it, Richard makes a claim that only a king can depose a king. He emphasizes his own agency, and calls on onlookers to recognize that agency as he relinquishes the crown:

Now, mark me how I will undo myself.

I give this heavy weight from off my head

And this unwieldy scepter from my hand,

The pride of kingly sway from out my heart.

With mine own hands I give away my crown;

With mine own tongue deny my sacred state;

With mine own breath release all duteous oaths. (4.1.202-09)

The repetition of first person pronouns keeps the focus squarely on Richard and his actions, and the opening call to “mark me” again asks the onstage audience to assent to Richard’s self-presentation. Though Richard can only see as far as the grave, ending his divestment of his kingly attributes with “And soon lie Richard in an earthy pit” (3.1.218), this prediction perhaps carries with it the hope of some political resurrection. Richard finds a way to imitate Christ’s Passion that suggests

he might retain political agency after his deposition, and manipulates the peers around him to provide collective assent to the analogies that he is drawing.

Yet there are severe risks to Richard's strategy. First, in aggregating to himself the authority to stage-manage the event, he arguably becomes morally responsible for every element of it, including the traitorous positions he assigns to the peers. His ability to speak for those around him in a way that prevents them from using their own voices means that the positions they occupy are ultimately attributable to him. As Richard puts it, "if I turn mine eyes upon my self /I find myself a traitor with the rest" (4.1.246-47). In ventriloquizing Judas, he may become Judas—not just a traitor, but also a suicide. Second, Richard addresses and then dismisses his human audience by asking them to consider the true significance of assenting to "God save the king." But by problematizing what is usually an empty formula of support for the political status quo, Richard evokes God as the supposed guarantor of that status quo, and as an audience far less susceptible to manipulation. Richard himself cannot finally assert that God is on his side, but can only express the hope that he might be ("God save the king, although I be not he, /And yet Amen if heaven do think him me," 4.1.174-75). The providentialist Christian history that Richard hopes to align himself with in order to assert political agency remains disconnected from the human action. And the attempt to mirror Christ's voluntary death risks trespassing on the boundaries Rogers outlines between appropriate and inappropriate imitation. Richard's strategy, consequently, leaves unanswered questions about how closely human and divine audiences align. Does his ability to force an embarrassed acquiescence to a politically expedient form of *Imitatio Christi*

mean that it has to be taken seriously as a religious performance? Or does its very political legibility ensure that Richard's actions fail as a devotional practice? Richard himself is unsure.

To the peers onstage and to God, moreover, we can add a third audience: the one watching the play. For this theater audience, Richard's deliberate impersonation of Christ is offset by his unconscious, anachronistic impersonation of Marlowe's Faustus, which suggests that Richard may be nursing a wish to die in a way that is neither spiritually nor politically efficacious. Richard picks up on Faustus's language when he wishes that he "were a mockery king of snow /Standing before the sun of Bullingbrook, /To melt myself away in water drops" and when he comments on his face in the mirror by asking "Was this face the face /That every day under his household roof /Did keep ten thousand men?" (4.1.259-61, 80-82).⁵³ Most damningly, the linguistic parallels might lead to the conclusion that Richard, like Faustus, is a reprobate. His attempts to imitate Christ's Passion in order to achieve a politically and spiritually good death are actually blasphemous parodies that confirm his lack of grace. And his impersonation of a historically posterior reprobate of whose existence he cannot be personally aware either indicates a divine (and authorial) plan controlling his actions and operating at a level which he does not have access to, or Faustian desires for dissolution. While Richard may think he is imitating an exemplary model of dying, he is in fact inhabited – haunted – by another unwelcome *moriens* that he is unaware of.

By the final act, Richard's uncertainty about the right way to approach his imminent death increases his resemblance to Faustus. Though there are no explicit

verbal parallels to match those that occur during the deposition, Richard's last soliloquy is structurally very similar to Faustus's. Both speakers cycle inconclusively through different understandings of the relation between themselves and the world, with their various theories in each case turning out to be self-defeating. Faustus's Epicurean and Pythagorean fantasies are matched by Richard's "thoughts of things divine," "Thoughts tending to ambition" and "Thoughts tending to content," none of which are capable of easing him (5.5.12, 18, 23). Both, too, experience a discord between their own indefinitely circling and inconclusive patterns of thought and an external signifier of the passage of time – the clock for Faustus and an unseen musician for Richard. For each speaker, then, the soliloquy exhibits the impossibility of sustaining a coherent human narrative in the approach to death. Ultimately, both the inconclusive churning of his thoughts and the unwitting parallel to Faustus seem to mark Richard's attempts to achieve an imitative good death modeled on Christ's as failed.

Shakespeare differs from Marlowe, though, in the way in which he historicizes and contextualizes this problematic by pointing up distinctions between Richard's Medieval Catholic milieu and Faustus's post-Reformation one. Consequently, Richard's untimely and anachronistic evocation of Faustus actually cautions us against understanding the passage of time in too teleological a fashion and being too ready to conclude that Faustus reveals the truth of Richard. Just as Faustus's position situates and qualifies Richard's, so Richard's might also situate and qualify Faustus's. The practice of bodily evoking a prior figure in order to achieve heavenly or worldly goals is shown to have a history that encompasses

conventions of theatrical representation but exceeds them. It moreover implies that the prior examples being invoked have a certain autonomy, since they bring with them the context, a set of implicit values, associated with a particular moment in time. Like Richard's onstage audience of peers, Shakespeare's post-medieval offstage audience is also required to inhabit two dual perspectives: one that accepts the Medieval Catholic framework of Richard's actions as part of a historical context and perhaps even attempts to inhabit it so as to better understand the play, and one that from the outside can either condemn Richard as a superstitious reprobate or mourn him in Benjaminian terms as a relic of a lost, enchanted world. In a way, this is true of any history play. But the anachronistic evocation of Faustus brings the problem to the fore and figures it in terms of strategies of impersonation with roots in different theological understandings of the relationship of a Christian imitator to his or her model. *Richard II* therefore implies that the problem of right relation to the past and right imitation of past example does not affect Richard alone. It also becomes a difficulty for members of the audience, who are reminded both of their situation within their own historical era and of the fact that they, like Richard, are required to relate to past examples in order to attempt to manage their temporal and spiritual fates.

IV.

Similarly productive clashes between temporalities emerge around Richard's death. The death scene evokes unacknowledged accounts of Catholic martyrdoms, especially the murder of Thomas Becket, to suggest that anachronistic or untimely habitations of dubious exemplary models may be politically useful in a way that

more conventional *ars moriendi* could not be. Earlier, Richard's practice of strategic imitative *ars moriendi* had foundered on the incompatibility between normative understandings of the examples inspiring an ordinary Christian's approach to death and Richard's insistence on his own exceptionality, or between understandings of Christ as an analogue for a human *moriens* and for a godlike sovereign. Richard's behavior continually risks becoming aggrandizing or excessive, and pointing to worldly or fallen desires that undermine any attempt to use a practice of dying well to support a political project. In this context, untimely intimations of Faustus appear to confirm Richard's proximity to the figure of the reprobate. However, saintly martyrs evoke a different economy, where power is derived precisely from untimeliness and exception. The depiction of Richard's death relies on this economy and moreover implies that it persists even in the supposedly post-medieval, Protestant context in which Shakespeare is writing. Linear narratives of a progression from medieval ceremonial sacred kingship to something more modern are dependent on hidden recreations of earlier examples. Again, there is something anamorphic about the postures Richard adopts and the contradictory perspectives that viewers have to occupy in order to fully understand what he is doing. More than the adoption of any particular imitative *moriens* posture, or any attempt to use such a posture to affirm a stable providential link between the self, God and the world, what may be useful to Richard is precisely the untimely way in which premature or belated models of dying can be evoked. Moreover since this untimeliness can also easily discomfit the play's audience, it raises questions the potency such a practice might have beyond the fictional world being dramatized.

Shakespeare probably derives his account of the king's murder primarily from Raphael Holinshed's *Chronicles of England, Ireland and Scotland*.⁵⁴ As Lister Matheson observes, both the chronicle account of Richard's death and Shakespeare's adaptation of it bear a striking resemblance to the events surrounding Thomas Becket's murder. Matheson does not clearly distinguish between Shakespeare's and Holinshed's accounts of Richard's death, but notes the following general parallels: both Richard and Becket are assaulted by groups, offer some initial resistance, and, in the Chronicle and possibly in stage tradition, are finally killed by deathblows to the head (the anointed part of the body); both Henry II and Henry IV first provoke the assassinations through ambiguous rhetorical questions and then subsequently spurn the murderers, deny complicity and seek penance.⁵⁵ However, in fact Shakespeare departs from Holinshed in a number of ways that serve to reinforce the parallel with Becket. Whereas Holinshed states that Richard had no opportunity to "call to God," Shakespeare's Richard has the time to narrate his death as a spiritual event with anticipated consequences for the peace of Henry IV's reign.⁵⁶ Additionally, kingly disavowal of the murder and penance assume a far more significant role in Shakespeare's account than in Holinshed's. The *Chronicle* does not discuss Henry IV's reaction to Richard's death or his treatment of Exton. Henry's proposed crusade is only mentioned when he is on his own deathbed, and is not explicitly connected to any guilt he feels on account of his treatment of Richard.⁵⁷ By contrast, Bullingbrook's announcement of a crusade as a penitential response to the murder is given emphasis by its position as the final event in Shakespeare's play.

Like Richard's earlier impersonations of Christ and Faustus during the deposition scene, the resemblance to Becket functions both as a strategic imitation from the perspective of the characters in the play, and as an untimely, excessive and doctrinally problematic allusion from the belated perspective of the Elizabethan theater audience. To treat the characters first, we can identify expedient reasons for both Bullingbrook and Richard to draw on the pattern of Becket's death without acknowledging that that is what they are doing.⁵⁸ For Bullingbrook, the precedent offers a model for getting rid of a dangerous political rival while maintaining distance from the actions of the assassins through verbal ambiguity and a public performance of penance after the event. His declaration, "Lords, I protest my soul is full of woe /That blood should sprinkle me to make me grow," shows him not only to be reacting to the immediate event of Richard's assassination, but furthermore to be aware of an audience who will judge his reactions (5.6.45-46). He displays a self-consciousness that implies he has anticipated how his actions will be read as part of a narrative of martyrdom.

Bullingbrook adopts the postures of Henry II when they are expedient while striving to alter some of the practical implications they had historically. First, he acts to avoid any institutionalized response to Richard's death. Henry II's penance involved a ritualized formal submission to an independent church. Moreover this penance was bound up with the king's agreement to the expansions of ecclesiastical temporal power that Becket had been killed for advocating along with his acquiescence to the creation of the cult of Saint Thomas of Canterbury, which became a significant source of church wealth independent from the monarchy.⁵⁹ In

Shakespeare's account, Bullingbrook insists he regrets his part in Richard's death and promises to embark on a pilgrimage or crusade to the Holy Land as penance. But this promise is not enforced by any formal church structure. Indeed, the representative of Church hierarchy on the stage at this point, the Bishop of Carlisle, who had previously linked Bullingbrook's usurpation to a heavenly intervention promising destruction, has just been sentenced for that treasonous outburst and told to "Choose out some secret place, some reverend room, /More than thou hast, and with it joy thy life /So that thou livest in peace die free from strife." (5.6.25-27). That is, Carlisle has just been removed from a public pastoral role to a private "reverend" sphere.

The anticipation of Carlisle's death as the termination of the sentence, moreover, encourages the Bishop to shift his attention away from apocalyptic world history towards a private approach to his personal end. Bullingbrook attempts to decouple personal eschatology from world eschatology, and personal acts of faith from any institutional or public display of faith. Bullingbrook's own penance, in fact, becomes so personalized and so internalized that it never takes on any concrete form at all. The intention to embark on a crusade remains unrealized at the end of *Henry IV part 2*, when instead of being killed in battle in the Holy Land the king dies of natural causes in the Jerusalem chamber. Henry fulfills his commitment in a purely nominal manner and overwrites the promise of crusading martyrdom with the actuality of an unheroic, bedridden death that is far more compatible with the conventions of the *ars moriendi* tradition.⁶⁰ The martyrdom of Thomas Becket provides Bullingbrook with a precedent for ridding himself of a political rival, but in

adopting this precedent, he strives to eliminate both the institutional religious structures and the charismatic charge that would enable a death to function as martyrdom. The ordinariness of his own end becomes an ironic marker of his success in this project.

The impersonation of a figure like Becket is also expedient for Richard, though for opposed reasons. Unexpectedly, Richard is able to successfully fulfill what should be contradictory chivalric and religious expectations for the good death. He acquits himself valiantly in the play's only episode of violent action, and then in the moment of death presents himself as a saintly martyr:

That hand shall burn in never-quenching fire

That staggers thus my person. Exton, thy fierce hand

Hath with the king's blood stained the king's own land.

Mount, mount my soul. Thy seat is up on high

While my gross flesh sinks downward, here to die. (5.5.108-12)

Richard ties his immediate spiritual fate and the fate of his killer to the fate of the kingdom. His observation that Exton "Hath with the king's blood stained the king's own land" builds on Carlisle's prophesy to imply that civil unrest will follow as a heavenly punishment for the stain of regicide and usurpation. In doing so, it recalls Holinshed's report of some of Becket's last words: "I am readie to die for my God, and for the defense of his iustice and the libertie of the church; gladlie doo I imbrace death, so that the church may purchase peace and libertie by the shedding of my blood."⁶¹ In both instances, the dying figure announces their habitation of a posture

of martyrdom and implies that the mechanical operation of falling blood will bring about political reorganization.

However, Richard, like Bullingbrook, inhabits the precedent with modifications. These suggest that what is appealing and potent to him about martyrdom is precisely its transgressive, exceptional qualities, which place it both above and below ordinary postures of *ars moriendi*, and even make it difficult to distinguish from suicide. First, he is no more eager than Bullingbrook to link his martyrdom to the institutional church; his postures of faith are charismatic, entirely self-sustaining and aimed at asserting that his kingship gives him a unique link to the divine. Second, he understands his blood to have an action as potent as Becket's, but almost opposite in effect. As I note above, Becket's devotees expressed such strong beliefs in the healing powers of the saint's blood that Protestant reformers accused them of idolatry. Richard's blood, by contrast, is imagined as contaminating the kingdom with guilt for his death, and in doing so it evokes the revenants thought to emerge as a consequence of violent deaths and suicides. The staining effect of the blood allows Richard to resolve the difficulty he encountered earlier in assuming a practice of dying that was both politically effective and spiritually sincere. Now, Richard envisions a clean and absolute separation between the corrupt flesh, which sinks down to add to the pollution of Bullingbrook's realm, and the soul that will ascend to a throne-like seat in heaven. Richard in his moment of death manages to slough off corruption, intimations of bad faith, and even suicidal or masochistic desires for death attaching to his fleshy existence, so that they become Bullingbrook's problem and, by drawing a contrast with that very image of bodily

corruption, insists on the essential sanctity of his soul. He becomes a martyr both in the positive understanding endorsed by devotees of medieval cults of the saints, and in the negative superstitious and suicidal understanding that prevailed after the Reformation. Richard finally turns the problem of how to imitate exemplary deaths into its own solution, manipulating and deriving power from the contested status of martyrdom in relation to the *ars moriendi* tradition.

Significantly, Shakespeare shows that Richard is able to disseminate this interpretation of his death successfully. His narrative of martyrdom is immediately accepted as true by his murderer, who suddenly regrets his actions and disavows them as the promptings of a devil (5.5.115-16), and it continues to have a purchase over the rest of the tetralogy. This trajectory culminates in Henry V's description of the dead king's reinterment on the eve of the Battle of Agincourt:

I Richard's body have interrèd new,
And on it have bestowed more contrite tears
Than from it issued forcèd drops of blood.
Five hundred poor have I in yearly pay
Who twice a day their withered hands hold up
Toward heaven to pardon blood. And I have built
Two chantries, where the sad and solemn priests
Sing still for Richard's soul.⁶²

The beadsmen and priests gathered round Richard's tomb make it a center of religious activity structurally similar to a devotional cult. However, unlike devotees at a shrine who seek intercession through the blood of the saint, those praying for

Richard seek to prevent his blood from acting. Indeed, their behavior rather recalls the activity of the subjects Richard imagines trampling on him when he is buried in the king's highway, engaged in continuous business to keep down a ghost. Henry V apparently accepts Richard's own account of this significance of his death. More successfully than Bullingbrook, Richard has been able to smuggle a personal political agenda under the form of an imitative death based on the example of a martyr. This is because, unlike Bullingbrook, he is able to take advantage of martyrdom's unstable position outside of standard forms of *ars moriendi*, rather than having to attempt to remove its charisma and bring it in line with ordinary approaches to death.

For an Elizabethan theater audience, questions about the significance or appropriateness of imitating Becket's example are heightened by the change in the status of saints in general, and Becket in particular, after the Reformation. Matheson notes rather drily that "In the late sixteenth century, any reminiscences of Becket's murder would have been highly charged politically and in terms of the characters of Bolingbroke and Richard," but declines to explain precisely how this political charge would attach.⁶³ It is easy to think of ways in which the recreation of the martyrdom of a Catholic saint looks simply subversive. Successive Tudor administrations orchestrated a concerted propaganda campaign against Becket, which involved, among other things, literally scratching his name from books and suppressing pageants depicting his life.⁶⁴ Although it is impossible to tell how thoroughly these recordings infiltrated the popular consciousness, they certainly determined what was speakable about the archbishop.⁶⁵ For a viewer with a perspective at all

analogous to Foxe's, the parallel to Becket's death arguably taints both monarchs by aligning Richard with a rebellious traitor and Bullingbrook with a king who capitulated to a Vatican power-grab. Insofar as either character inhabits the precedent of Becket's murder deliberately, he actually might be worse than the original since he is choosing to reenact something that has already been marked as treasonous and problematically Roman Catholic. More dangerously, drawing attention to similarities between Becket and Richard, or Henry II and Henry IV, tends to taint Tudor mythographers' appropriation of Richard's deposition for a narrative justifying the accession of Henry VII. The parallel highlights the regularity with which iconic deaths have been used to achieve specific political ends over the course of history, and also how they can be refigured as political conditions change. Such recognition might encourage a skeptical attitude towards imitative practices of dying that can appear purely strategic, or emptied of positive religious significance after the Reformation.

However, any wrongness attaching to Henry and Richard for reenacting Becket's murder also attaches to Shakespeare and the Lord Chamberlain's Men for staging that reenactment, and even to the disapproving audience itself for recognizing it. This contagion is worth investigating further. It suggests that the very impropriety of using the murder of Becket as a model for dying in the 1590's invests it with a potency that can escape the action on stage. As I have already intimated, many critical accounts of *Richard II* draw strong oppositions between the medieval quality of Richard's kingship and the more modern form of rule practiced by Bullingbrook. In some of these analyses, the lamenting tone of much of the drama

reflects an epochal sense of loss of a clear link to Providential history and effective eschatology.⁶⁶ But if Becket makes himself felt to the audience through Richard's death less as the desired lost object of mourning than as the undesired practitioner of haunting, then this suggests a different sort of relationship to a Catholic religious past. The parallel implies an important structuring role for medieval understandings of imitative dying in the constitution of Bullingbrook's modern, unceremonial state and in the Elizabethan polity that justifies itself in part through Richard's death. This continuance is not just an instance of religious forms being either mourned, or strategically emptied out and secularized, because for part of the audience at least, the presence of Becket, and of Richard as Becket, may be unwelcome.

A tradition of exceptional dying practiced by saintly martyrs, and condemned as self-aggrandizing or suicidal by Protestant reformers, persists in Richard's death as an avatar of Becket. This persistence has an uncannily mournful quality (since, as in Benjamin's account, it evokes underworld ghosts as inverted signifiers of the loss of true eschatology), but also holds open the possibility of a real encounter. It fits into a wider pattern of deliberate imitations giving way to undesired hauntings. In the shock of recognizing an unwelcome Catholic saint who should not be present embodied on stage, the theater audience has to consider what exactly it is recognizing. Where is the saint? And how exactly does his real historical death relate to the death of Christ, to the death of the character they see on stage, and to the performance of death enacted by the player?

Bullingbrook's final address to Exton situates the chain of imitative deaths stretching from Christ through Becket to Richard within a larger and more recursive

history. When Bullingbrook tells Exton "With Cain go wander through the shades of night" (5.6.43), he completes a series of allusions to Genesis 4 stretching through the play from his complaint in the first scene that the Duke of Gloucester's blood "like sacrificing Abel's, cries /Even from the tongueless caverns of the earth /To me for justice and rough chastisement," (1.1.104-06) to Richard's insistence that his blood has stained the land.⁶⁷ Notably, the immediate application of references to Cain and Abel changes over the course of the narrative. In Act One, Abel is Gloucester, while Cain is apparently Mowbray but probably really Richard himself as the sponsor of the murder with the blood relation to the victim. By Act Five, Abel has become Richard, while Cain is apparently Exton but probably really Bullingbrook. The potential for different deaths to evoke the same model with difference implies an open-ended process where the dead are embodied and revived through imitation to die again on different occasions. In a double movement, as the history depicted by the play moves forwards, the deaths it evokes come from an earlier time. Abel is both the example and the exception. He is the first human to die in the Bible, the model for all subsequent deaths, yet Christian authors frequently read him typologically to prefigure the Passion and the subsequent deaths of martyrs.⁶⁸ His original death becomes anachronistically citational as subsequent Christianizing accretions overwrite, but do not quite erase, the original Jewish model. The allusion to Abel suggests that deaths are always mimetic, that the modes of imitative dying Richard and Bullingbroke appropriate for specific political purposes, along with the differences between medieval and renaissance imitative practices, are only

temporary manifestations in a much longer story typified by recursions and reworkings that continue indefinitely.

V.

At least one Elizabethan viewer of *Richard II* believed that the play's patterns of personation stretched into the present. In the aftermath of the Essex rebellion, when the conspirators' sponsorship of a performance of a play about Richard II that was probably Shakespeare's came under scrutiny, the Queen is supposed to have objected, "I am Richard II. Know ye not that?"⁶⁹ Though critics continue to debate the topicality of *Richard II*, Elizabeth's assumption that an identity between a dramatic impersonation of a historical character and a living monarch was possible, and that this identity could be intended to effect political change, or even bring about the end of the rule or life of the monarch through merging her with a prior example, is significant in itself for what it suggests about Elizabethan sovereignty and theater.

The dramatic dimensions of Elizabeth's monarchical persona have been extensively studied.⁷⁰ One aspect of her theatrical self-presentation was her explicit association with iconic alter-egos drawn from history and myth—the Queen of the Fairies, Cynthia, Boudicca. Another, largely hidden but arguably more important, was the reconstitution of elements of the cult of the Virgin Mary around the Virgin Queen. *Richard II* explores the ramifications of just these sorts of strategic personations, both those that are speakable and those that are not, and uncovers links between them and devotional strategies of imitation and impersonation. These parallels, I think, should encourage us to qualify some of the ways in which

Elizabethan monarchical power has been discussed as performative, or described as a secular appropriation of religious concepts and postures. Though there is certainly a performative dimension to the arts of dying and the imitations of martyrdom I have discussed in this chapter, this should not be taken to suggest that they are mere mimicry or distanced, mournful representation of something hopelessly lost. The potency characters find in these practices lies precisely in the possibility that through them they really are achieving a substantive relationship with their models. The haunting, anachronistic, problematically Catholic, or arguably blasphemous ways in which those examples sometimes get inhabited do not necessarily foreclose on this relationship. Rather, the very fact that some allusions are discomfiting gives them a charge that escapes the immediate context of the historical moment being depicted, and figures for the audience the type of union with past models that characters are hoping to create. For Elizabeth, the opportunity to be Cynthia or Boudicca may carry with it the risk of being Richard II. Monarchical impersonation is effective not because it empties out religious forms and turns them into occasions for purely secular display, but because it remains live, in dialogue with religious practices of imitation that assume the links between the living Queen and the imitated dead are not only illusion or presentation.

These considerations also suggest different ways to think about theatrical playing. A critique of the theater, originating in Plato and revived by anti-theatrical Puritan tracts, claims that mimesis leads players to take on the qualities and characters of the objects being imitated. Playing can therefore have a negative moral effect on the person playing a bad character.⁷¹ *Richard II* shows characters testing

out similar lines of thinking and assuming that embodiment of examples will have moral and social consequences. But in doing so, they explore a full range of positive and negative possibilities. They consider models from Christ through saints and sinners to Judas, and variously understand impersonation as the merging of identities and as a practice that asserts difference between the mimic and the model. Moreover, by drawing attention to the place of dramatic mimesis within a wider field of spiritual and political imitative practices, *Richard II* encourages a reconsideration of the potency of representational acting. Rather than reducing the imitative efforts of the characters to mere performances analogous to playing, we might consider raising the significance we accord to playing as something that is modeled in part on a practice of *Imitatio Christi*, and that, like *Imitatio Christi*, aims to generate effects in the world through achieving a substantive union between the imitator and the imitated.

The place of various imitative practices of dying in a larger tradition of *ars moriendi* changes between the Middle Ages and the Renaissance. But the representation of these changes in *Richard II* demonstrates the continuing vitality of homiletic traditions and the importance of their concerns into late sixteenth century and within spheres such as the theater commonly thought of as secular in their outlook. The productively anachronistic and untimely ways in which Shakespeare, for one, draws on various embodied models for dying well or badly implies that change is not only marked by rejection or mournful nostalgia for what is lost but also by awareness of scarcely acknowledgeable continuities. Moreover, continuities can allow playwrights to rework traditional models in unexpected contexts so as to

respond to social and political changes. In the next chapter, I shall look further at some of these opportunities by considering how Ben Jonson's *Volpone* attempts to decouple a practice of dying from the biological process of dying in order to shore up an autonomous identity in the face of community encroachment.

¹ Giorgio Agamben, for example, distinguishes between example as "exclusive inclusion" and exception as "inclusive exclusion," which he sees as existing in a symmetrical, opposing relationship to one another, though in fact the paradoxes they each generate are structurally rather analogous. See Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998), 21-22. However, though in formal terms the opposition may be stark, examples and exceptions tend to blur together in their practical, rhetorical usage, as John D. Lyons notes in *Exemplum: The Rhetoric of Example in Early Modern France and Italy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989), esp. 25-34. *Richard II*, I will argue, problematizes distinctions between exception and example by continually recasting one as the other.

² For example, see Walter Benjamin's account of *Trauerspiel* in *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*, trans. John Osborne (London: Verso, 1998); Harry Berger, *Imaginary Audition: Shakespeare on Stage and Page* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989); Zenón Luis-Martínez, "Shakespeare's Historical Drama as *Trauerspiel*: *Richard II* and After," *ELH*, 75 (2008): 673.

³ Berger argues that Richard's desire for death is evident throughout the play (*passim*).

⁴ William Shakespeare, *King Richard II*, ed. Andrew Gurr (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 3.2.148-54. Further references will be given parenthetically.

⁵ Gurr, note to 3.2.153.

⁶ As Ernst Kantorowicz puts it, "The king that 'never dies' here has been replaced by the king that always dies and suffers death more cruelly than other mortals," *The King's Two Bodies: A Study in Mediaeval Political Theology* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1957), 30.

⁷ For an account of how resemblances between sleep and death are used by Shakespeare to theorize sovereignty, see Benjamin Parris, "The Body is with the King but the King is not with the Body: Sovereign Sleep in *Hamlet* and *Macbeth*," *Shakespeare Studies*, 40 (2012): 101.

⁸ "Haunt, v." Definition 5b, *OED Online*, March 2013, Oxford University Press.

⁹ "Haunt, v." Definitions 1-3.

¹⁰ Death as king is a standard motif of macabre art, represented by images of "The dark monarch's progress... a formal triumph *all'antica*: mounted in splendor, like the monarch of some Renaissance royal entry, King Death rides through the world on a magnificent parade chariot," (Neill, *Issues of Death*, 89 and 88-101). See also Ariès, *The Hour of Our Death*, 118-19. The antic death emerges out of the Dance of Death tradition, in which cadavers and skeletons appear to people representing all stations in life, and parody their characteristic actions as they drag them away. See Neill, 51-88; Ariès 116-18.

¹¹ Luis-Martínez, 689.

¹² Andrew Leggatt discusses Richard's behavior in *Shakespeare's Political Drama: The History Plays and the Roman Plays* (London: Routledge, 1988), 67-71. Margreta de Grazia suggests a more general affinity between dispossession and an antic demeanor, arguing that Hamlet's antic disposition is both a reaction to his loss of his inheritance and a useful posture since "The persona he assumes licenses him to express his resentment, not openly but in the 'wild and whirling words' (1.5.139) of the Antic, the madman who even in a court of law is not held accountable for the meaning of his words," Margreta de Grazia, *Hamlet Without Hamlet*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 89.

¹³ Kantorowicz, 24-41. For responses and challenges to Kantorowicz's reading of the play, see Marie Axton, *The Queen's Two Bodies: Drama and the Elizabethan Succession* (London: Royal Historical Society, 1977); David Norbrook, "The Emperor's New Body? *Richard II*, Ernst Kantorowicz, and the Politics of Shakespeare Criticism," *Textual Practice*, Vol. 10 (Summer 1996), 329-57; Richard Halpern, "The King's Two Buckets: Kantorowicz, *Richard II* and Fiscal *Trauerspiel*," *Representations* Vol. 106 (Spring 2009), 67-76.

¹⁴ Mark 8:34-35. All biblical quotations are from the Geneva Version unless otherwise noted.

¹⁵ Romans 6:5.

¹⁶ On death's non-relationality, see Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (New York: Harper & Row, 1962), 294.

¹⁷ 1 Corinthians 11:1.

¹⁸ Ephesians 5:1. In both quotations, the word translated in the Geneva version as "followers" is *mimetai* (imitators) in the Greek New Testament.

¹⁹ In Mark J. Edwards, ed. *Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians*, Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1999) 182.

²⁰ For example, Augustine argues that martyrdom can guarantee a place in heaven even for a believing Christian who has not been baptized (*City of God*, XIII.7).

²¹ Jacobus de Voragine and William Caxton, *The Golden Legend: Or, Lives of the Saints*. (London: J. M. Dent and co., 1900). Vol. 4, 21.

²² "Then Peter remembered the words of Jesus, which had said unto him, Before the cock crow thou shalt deny me thrice. So he went out, and wept bitterly." Matthew 26:75.

²³ Jacobus, *The Golden Legend*, 23.

²⁴ Jacobus, *The Golden Legend*, Vol. 5, 37.

²⁵ Duffy, 170.

²⁶ Julia Lupton also notes this tendency to amplification and extension in descriptions of the torments of the saints. Focusing less on what this implies about the desires of the saints themselves than on what it suggests about the attraction of hagiography for readers, she argues that the saint's displayed tortured body is a symptom which "at once indicates and covers over the lack in the Other that jeopardizes the perceived coherence of the natural and social orders." Ever more elaborate torments extend the fantasy. In a different register, martyrdom is understood as manifesting desires that trouble any simple understanding of *Imitatio Christi* through martyrdom. Julia Lupton, *Afterlives of the Saints: Hagiography, Typology, and Renaissance Literature* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996), 51.

²⁷ Although I am emphasizing the presence of saints as a significant difference between Catholic and Protestant texts, this is not to deny that *artes moriendi* from both confessions remained primarily focused on Christ as the most important example and intercessor. In the words of the *Crafte and Knowledge for to Dye Well*, “suche thynges as Cryst dyd dyinge on the crosse the same shulde euery man do att hys last ende after hys kunnyng and power” (11).

²⁸ *Crafte*, 13. Woodcuts from the illustrated *Ars Moriendi* also show saints gathered around the good deathbed. For examples, see *Ars Moriendi: Lithographisches Facsimile Der In Der Fürstl. Fürstenbergschen Hofbibliothek Zu Donaueschingen Verwahrten Und Im Einzigen Exemplare Bekannten Deutschen Ausgabe Der Ars Moriendi Mit Xylographischem Text* (Augsburg: Butsch, 1874).

²⁹ “At, nescio quomodo, verso deinde aliorum aspectu, visus es etiam illi sanctissimus martir Erasmus, quem forte speciali venerabatur devocione, ea forma qua a carnificibus tortus depingi solet in ecclesiis, ipsis iam quasi renovates passionum torturis, iuxta iacere,” *Henrici VI Angliae Regis Miracula Postuma*, ed. Paulius Grosjean, (Brussels: Societe des Bollandistes, 1935) 100. The translation is from Duffy, 180. In fact, Walter was able to evade death in this instance due to miraculous intervention.

³⁰ Lupset, 81. John Walker is the friend to whom Lupset’s text is addressed.

³¹ See Beaty, 96-97.

³² John Foxe records the sermon of Richard Smith at the burning of Hugh Latimer and Nicholas Ridley: “Then doctor smith, of whose recantation in K. Edwards tyme, ye heard before, began his Sermon to them, vpon this text of Saint Paule, in the xiiij. chapter of the first Epistle to the Corinthians: Si corpus meum tradam igni, charitatem autem non habeo, nihil inde vtilitatis capio: That is, If I yeld my body to the fire to be burnt, & haue not Charitie, I shall gayne nothyng thereby. Where in he alledged, that the goodnesse of the cause, and not the order of death: maketh the holynes of the person: Which he confirmed by the examples of Iudas, and of a woman in Oxford that of late hanged her selfe, for that they and such lyke as he recited, might thē be adiudged righteous, which desperately sundered their lyues from their bodies, as he feared that those men that stood before hym would do.” *The Unabridged Acts and Monuments Online* (1583 edition) (HRI Online Publications, Sheffield, 2011). Available from: <http://www.johnfoxe.org> [Accessed: 01.03.11]. Bk. 11, 1793. Conversely, John Donne’s *Pseudo-Martyr*, a polemic directed against Catholics who resisted the oath of allegiance, insists that “if a man should in an immature and undigested zeale, expose his life for testimony of a matter, which were already believed, or to which he were not called by God, he did no more honor God in that acte, then a Subject should honour the King by subscribing his name, and giving his Testimony to any of the Kings Graunts.” John Donne, *Pseudo-Martyr*, ed. Anthony Raspa (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1993), 33.

³³ For details of the events leading to Becket’s murder and sanctification, and the reasons why Henry VIII was so keen to get rid of him, see Ann Duggan, *Thomas Becket* (London: Arnold, 2004). For a historical assessment of the destruction of the cult of St Thomas of Canterbury see Robert E. Scully, “The Unmaking of a Saint: Thomas Becket and the English Reformation,” *Catholic Historical Review*, 86 (2000): 579-602.

³⁴ *Letters and Papers, Foreign and Domestic, of the Reign of Henry VIII*, ed. J. Gairdner. Vol. 13: Part II: 1538 London: Her Majesty’s Stationery Office, 1893, State Papers Online, Gale, Cengage Learning, 2013, 848(3).

³⁵ Foxe, Bk. 4, 249.

³⁶ John Jewel, *A defence of the Apologie of the Church of Englande conteininge an answeare to a certaine booke lately set foorth by M. Hardinge, and entituled, A confutation of &c...* (London: 1567),

³⁷ Foxe also condemns a miraculous vision that showed "S. Thomas had hys place in heauen appoynted with the Apostles: aboue Stephen, Laurence, Vincent, and al the other Martyrs. Whereof this cause is rendered, for that s. Stephen. Laurence, and such other, suffered only for their own cause. But this Th. suffered for the vniuersal church." Bk. 4, 249.

³⁸ For instance, see the imitation of the Passion John Donne asks his congregation to perform in "Death's Duel, Preached before King Charles I (25 Febrary 1631)" in *The Major Works*, ed. John Carey (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), 401-18. Donne's own death then becomes an exemplary instance of a good Christian death in Izaak Walton's *Life of Dr. John Donne* in *Selected Writings*, ed. Jessica Martin (Oxford: Carcanet Press, 1997).

³⁹ Rogers claims that "I haue left out nothing but what might be offensiuie to the godlie. Yet is it neither for quantitie much, nor for number aboue foure sentences" in "A second Epistle concerning the trans|lation and correction of this Booke" in *Of the imitation of Christ, three, both for wisdom, and godlines, most excellent bookes; made 170. yeeres since by one Thomas of Kempis, and for the worthines thereof oft since translated out of Latine into sundrie languages by diuers godlie and learned men: now newlie corrected, translated, and with most ample textes, and sentences of holie Scripture illustrated* (London: 1580), 10. For an account of Rogers and of Protestant responses to the Imitatio Christi tradition, see Elizabeth K. Hudson, "English Protestants and the imitatio Christi, 1580-1620," *The Sixteenth Century Journal*, 19 (1988): 541-558.

⁴⁰ Rogers, "The first Epistle of the Translator touching Christian imitation in general, to the faithful Imitators of our Sauior Christ in England," in *Of the imitation of Christ*, 3-4.

⁴¹ As Rogers puts it, "good men are not in al things to be imitated. But as S. Paule would be so folowed, as he folowed Christ: so should they be" ("First Epistle," 6).

⁴² "First Epistle," 6-7.

⁴³ Rogers' footnote explains that the "God of Norweigh" is "One so called for his fasting 40. daies, which he did more than once." The full story of this individual (Henry of Hasselt) can be found in Johann Weyer, *Liber: Item, De Commentitiis Ieiuniis* (Basileae: Ex Officina Oporiniana, 1582), 127-28.

⁴⁴ Rogers explains further by saying "Our Sauior Christ therefore in those things which he did as a God must religiouslie be worshipped; and folowed zelouslie in what he did as a man. He that loueth and hateth what Christ as a God, doth loue and detest, imitates Christ as much as man maie imitate God. he that doth that which Christ did as a man, doth folowe Christ as a Christian should" (First Epistle, 7).

⁴⁵ "The spirit of the Mediator showed how it was through no punishment of sin that He came to the death of the flesh, because He did not leave it against His will, but because He willed, when He willed, as He willed. For because He is so commingled [with the flesh] by the Word of God as to be one, He says: 'I have power to lay down my life, and I have power to take it again. No man takes it from me, but I lay down my life that I might take it again.' And, as the Gospel tells us, they who were present were most astonished at this, that after that [last] word, in which He set forth the figure of our sin, He immediately gave up His spirit," Augustine, *On the Trinity*, trans. Arthur West Haddan in *A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church*, Vol. 3 (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1979) Bk. 4, Chap. 13. "Since Christ's soul did not repel the injury inflicted on His body, but willed His corporeal nature to succumb to such injury, He is said to have laid down His life, or to have died voluntarily," Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, trans. The Fathers of the English Dominican Province (Mobilereferenc.com, 2010) III, Q. 47, Art. 1.

⁴⁶ John Donne considers this possibility in *Biathanatos* (London: 1648), 190-91.

⁴⁷ Barry Nass "'Or I'll be buried on the King's High Way:' Abdication and the Interment of Suicides in *Richard II*," *ANQ* 13 (2000): 20-23.

⁴⁸ Michael MacDonald and Terence R. Murphy, *Sleepless Souls: Suicide in Early Modern England* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990), 47.

⁴⁹ Kantorowicz, 35. Compare Walter Pater, "It is as if Shakespeare had had in mind some such inverted rite, like those old ecclesiastical or military ones, by which human hardness, or human justice, adds the last touch of unkindness to the execution of its sentences, in the scene where Richard 'deposes' himself, as in some long, agonising ceremony, reflectively drawn out, with an extraordinary refinement of intelligence and variety of piteous appeal," *Appreciations* (London: Macmillan, 1890), 205-06.

⁵⁰ Leggatt, 68.

⁵¹ Robert M. Schuler, "De-coronation and Demonic Meta-Ritual in *Richard II*," *Exemplaria*, 17 (2005): 169-214.

⁵² There is a substantial body of work on the place of anamorphosis and perspectives in Early Modern culture in general and on Shakespeare's use of perspectival imagery in *Richard II* in particular, much of it taking a cue from Jacques Lacan's discussion of Holbein's *Ambassadors* in *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Norton, 1981), 79-119. See Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archeology of the Human Sciences* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1970), 1-16; Jurgis Baltrušaitis, *Anamorphic Art* (Cambridge: Chadwyck-Healey, 1977); Erwin Panofsky, *Perspective as Symbolic Form*, trans. Christopher Wood (New York: Zone Books, 1991); Slavoj Žižek, *Looking Awry: An Introduction to Jacques Lacan through Popular Culture* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1991); Hubert Damisch, *The Origin of Perspective*, trans. John Goodman (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1994); Lyle Massey, *Picturing Space, Displacing Bodies: Anamorphosis and Early Modern Theories of Perspective* (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2007); Luis-Martinez; Jen E. Boyle, *Anamorphosis in Early Modern Literature* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2010). In my discussion of how anamorphosis in *Richard II* frequently draws attention to embodiment and situatedness, I am influenced in particular by Massey's questioning of critical commonplaces that draw firm distinctions between conventional perspectival viewing practices associated with the Cartesian *cogito* and perverse, anamorphic ones that hint at the real, the void or the unconscious. In fact, Massey's historical work suggests that all perspective points were conceived as embodied by their original theorists, so that switches between frontal perspective and anamorphic perspective can be used to think about different understandings of being embodied in the world.

⁵³ Compare *Doctor Faustus*, "O soul, be changed into little water drops /And fall into the ocean, ne'er to be found!" (5.2.110-11); "Was this the face that launch'd a thousand ships /And burnt the topless towers of Ilium?" (5.1.90-91). These parallels are also discussed by Berger, 64-67.

⁵⁴ "One writer... saith that king Henrie, sitting on a daie at his table, sore sighing, said, "Have I no faithfull freend which will deliuer me of him, whose life will be my death, and whose death will be the preseruacion of my life;" This saieng was much noted of them which were present, and especiaillie of one called sir Piers of Exton. This knight incontinentlie departed from the court, with eight strong persons in his companie, and came to Pomfret... [Richard's attendants explain Exton's presence to him.] When king Richard heard that word, he tooke the keruing knife in his hand, and strake the esquire on the head, saieng The diuell take Henrie of Lancaster and thee together. And with that word, sir Piers entred the chamber, well armed, with eight tall men liewise armed, euerie of tem hauing a bill in his hand.

King Richard perceiuing this, put the table from him, & steping to the formost man, wrung the bill out of his hands, & so valiantlie defended himselfe, that he slue foure of those that thus came to assaile him... And in conclusion, as king Richard trauersed his ground, from one side of the chamber to an other, & coming by the chaire, where sir Piers stood, he was felled with a stroke of a pollax which sir Piers gaue him upon the head, and therewith rid him out of life, without giuing him respite once to call to God for mercie of his passed offenses. It is said, that sir Piers of Exton, after he had thus slaine him, wept right bitterlie, as one stricken with the pricke of a gilty conscience, for murthering him, whome he had so long time obeied as king." Raphael Holinshed, *The Chronicles of England, Scotland and Ireland* (London: J. Johnson, 1808) Vol. 3, 14.

⁵⁵ Lister Matheson, "English Chronicle Contexts for Shakespeare's Death of Richard II" in *From Page to Performance: Essays in Early English Drama* (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 1995), 211-12. Matheson's comprehensive discussion of Shakespeare's sources focuses on the depiction of Richard's death. For analysis of the sources of the play as a whole, see also Geoffrey Bullough, *Narrative and Dramatic Sources of Shakespeare* (New York: Colombia University Press, 1957) Vol. 3. For the full account of Becket's murder, see Holinshed, Vol. 2, 134-36.

⁵⁶ Holinshed, Vol. 3, 14.

⁵⁷ "In this fourteenth and last yeare of king Henries reigne, a counsell was holden in the white friers in London, at the which, among other things, order was taken for ships and gallies to be builded and made readie, and all other things necessarie to be prouided for a voyage which he meant to make into the holie land, there to recouer the citie of Ierusalem from the Infidels. For it greeued him to consider the great malice of Christian princes, that were bent vpon a mischeefous purpose to destroe one another, to the peril of their owne soules, rather than to make war against the enimies of the Christian faith, as in conscience (it seemed to him) they were bound" (Holinshed, Vol. 3, 57).

⁵⁸ Their shared project of generating a martyrdom around Richard perhaps reflects Benjamin's observations about the coincidence between martyr and tyrant in *Trauerspiel* (73).

⁵⁹ See Duggan, 226-36.

⁶⁰ Jeffrey Knapp also draws attention to references to crusading in the *Henriad*, and sees them in light of confessional dispute. However, for him, the crusades become a site for which to explore the possibilities for international Christendom after the break from Rome (*Shakespeare's Tribe*, 80-112).

⁶¹ Holinshed, Vol. 2, 136.

⁶² *Henry V*, in *The Norton Shakespeare*, ed. Stephen Greenblatt, Walter Cohen, Jean E. Howard, Katharine Eisaman Maus (New York: Norton, 2008), 4.1.277-84.

⁶³ Matheson, 212.

⁶⁴ See Duffy, 412; Scully, *passim*.

⁶⁵ On the other side, Scully provides evidence of the persistence of devotion to Becket within recusant circles (600), while Keith Thomas uncovers a tradition of Prophecies attributed (by Protestant writers) to Thomas Becket in the middle of the seventeenth century. See Keith Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1971), 395, 410.

⁶⁶ See in particular, E.M. Tillyard, *Shakespeare's History Plays* (New York: Macmillan, 1946) 244-64; Kantorowicz; Berger (who argues that Richard himself is already on the side of disenchantment); Luis-Martinez. David Womersley swims against tide to argue that while Bullingbrook represents

something like Tudor pragmatism, Richard should be linked to an anticipation of James's absolutism (*Divinity and State*, 285-99).

⁶⁷ Compare Genesis 4:11, "Now therefore thou art cursed from the earth, which hath opened her mouth to receive thy brother's blood from thy hand."

⁶⁸ For example, Bede says "Some understand... the killing of Abel as the passion of the Lord and Savior" while Origen asks us to "suppose that the verse 'The voice of your brother's blood is crying to me from the ground' is said as well for each of the martyrs, the voice of whose blood cries to God from the ground" (Bede, *Homilies on the Gospels* 1.14; Origen, *Exhortation to Martyrdom* 50, both quoted and translated in Andrew Louth, ed. *Genesis 1-11*, Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2001) 106-08.

⁶⁹ John Nicols, ed., *Bibliotheca Topographica Britannica* vol. 1 (London: 1780) 525, quoted in Jason Scott-Warren, "Was Elizabeth I Richard II?: The Authenticity of Lambarde's "Conversation," *The Review of English Studies* (2012). Scott-Warren also surveys recent critical assessments of the authenticity and political significance of the conversation.

⁷⁰ See, for example, Axton; Stephen Greenblatt, "Invisible Bullets" in *Shakespearean Negotiations: The Circulation of Social Energy in Renaissance England* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989); Jean Wilson, *The Archaeology of Shakespeare: The Material Legacy of Shakespeare's Theater* (Stroud: Alan Sutton, 1995); Louis Montrose, *The Purpose of Playing: Shakespeare and the Cultural Politics of the Elizabethan Theater* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996).

⁷¹ Plato, *The Republic* 3.394b-396e. For a survey of Puritan treatment of these themes, see Barish, *The Antitheatrical Prejudice*, 101-06.

**“THIS IS CALLED MORTIFYING OF A FOX:” *VOLPONE*, COMMUNITY THEATER,
AND HOW TO GET RICH QUICK BY DYING SLOWLY**

Why does Volpone pretend to be dying? In a way, the answer is obvious: he wants to make a profit. From the beginning of the play, Volpone is marked as avaricious; his first action is to worship his gold as a saint. When he counterfeits dying, he evokes a long tradition of literary misers who extract gifts from Legacy Hunters and promise them inheritances in return.¹ So far, so conventional. However, Volpone himself cautions us against explaining his motivation so simply. Both he and Mosca note the ready availability of other means to make money, which stand in distinction to the particularity of their practice. Volpone insists that he gains “No common way,” while Mosca specifically distinguishes Volpone’s scam from the actions of usurers, who “devour /Soft prodigals” or “tear forth the fathers of poor families /Out of their beds, and coffin them, alive /In some kind, clasping prison, where their bones /May be forthcoming when the flesh is rotten.”² In distinction to a common way understood as trading in the actual or simulated death of others, Volpone chooses to trade in the death of the self.³ Therefore Volpone, in his own presentation at least, exemplifies avarice of a specific and unusual form, cultivated for a specific and unusual purpose. His behavior, I argue, constitutes an attempt to use economic mechanisms to reshape conventional relationships between the individual and the community. His success in exploiting his own death for material gain reveals tensions and fault lines within traditional models of sociality. And

Jonson's play then considers what alternative forms of social organization could accommodate such venture and speculation.

Volpone's actions are motivated by a radically anti-social sensibility. He demonstrates a desire to undercut established understandings of communal existence because he associates assumption into community with assumption into non-being and ultimately with death. His words and actions reflect an understanding of community obligations as a threat to individual identity. To avoid these obligations, Volpone perverts traditional understandings of the deathbed as a communal endeavor, and of inheritance as the perpetuation of dynastic identity. By imitating a dying man, he takes the very situation he fears and refigures it as a willed act through which he can affirm separation and autonomy, and his acquisition of money becomes a marker of the success of this project. Volpone rejects community in order to profit privately, but he also profits privately in order to reject the community.

The court scenes where the fraud is finally unmasked and Volpone and the legacy hunters are punished, depict an attempt by the state to harness the destructive forces unleashed by Volpone's exploitation of his death. By the end of the play, Volpone's fate has been determined through a judicial process based on assumptions about the relationship between the individual, property and society fundamentally different to those underpinning the traditional deathbed community. The *Avocatori* hand down judgments concerned with the identification of miscreants' social statuses, and inflict punishments that will force them to conform to pre-existing norms. The project of dying as an individual, in a way that inhabits a

communal model of the deathbed, but also resists and invalidates its judgments so as to claim personal ownership of that death, has been rendered impossible. Instead, an impersonal authority imposes generalized standards that ratify, and are ratified by, centralized institutions.

However, these institutions do not seek simply to neutralize Volpone's earlier challenge to commonality, but instead aim to extend and exploit it. The court confiscates Volpone's "substance" to support the public Hospital of the Incurabili, and Volpone himself is confined in a prison in an indefinite posture of "mortification." His dying comes under state control. Ultimately, the nexus between property, individuality and dying which Volpone strives to exploit in the deathbed scenes, along with the responses of the *Avocatori*, figure some distinctive aspects of an emergent modern public sphere. Volpone may start by denying that he participates in the common way, by the end of the play, his actions have come to emblemize of the style of thinking that will inaugurate new public forms of political, social and economic organization.⁴ At the same time, though, Volpone relies on practices and assumptions from the traditional deathbed to ground his fraud, and these persist in modified form even in the final settlement. This persistence should encourage us to reassess both the role of traditional devotional practices in constituting modernity, and the extent to which religious practices condition ostensibly secular understandings of individual and collective agency.

Volpone describes his behavior as "playing," and could therefore be seen as unmasking the *ars moriendi* as mere performance, as a type of histrionic self-fashioning that has no necessary spiritual content and is easily impersonated.

However, as I show, Jonson actually uses the similarity between the art of dying and the art of acting to think critically about the nature of human action, and about the distinction between being and doing when activity is reduced to a barely perceptible level. The play is less concerned with condemning morally dubious mimetic deception than with exploring the nature of a selfhood that understands itself through its ability to mimetically deceive. Volpone's fraud should therefore encourage us to complicate ways in which Jonson has been characterized as "anti-theatrical."⁵ Within the play's depiction of counterfeited dying and enforced mortification, an ethical critique of Volpone's deception and avarice exists alongside a more exploratory investigation of the nature of dramatic performance, and of how the embodied impersonation of the actor, the author's words and the judgment of the audience come together in the commercial theater.

I.

To appreciate the anti-social nature of Volpone's fraud, it is necessary to understand what the good, communal deathbed was supposed to look like. A well-established theological and devotional tradition asserts that a shared experience of Christian death generates communal bonds and communal benefits. As I mentioned in the previous chapter, for Paul, the Christian community is founded on the dying body of Christ since the crucifixion overwrites the inevitability of sin's leading to death under the law with a new understanding of dying that promises eternal life to those who have faith ("For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life, through Jesus Christ our Lord."⁶ When he calls for Christians to be "planted with [Christ] to the similitude of his death," so that can also share "*the similitude* of his

resurrection,” Paul suggests a community that is joined together by witnessing and participating in a shared experience of dying well.⁷ Similarly, Augustine uses the unique relation that Christians have to death on account of grace as a way of defining the membership of the City of God,⁸ and characterizes his fellow Christians as those who are “*consortium mortalitatis meae*” [partners in mortality with me].⁹

John Donne’s *Devotions upon Emergent Occasions* indicates how a theological association between dying and community influenced representations and understandings of the deathbed in the early seventeenth century. In Expostulation 17, Donne, lying on his sickbed and hearing a bell tolling for an unknown man, praises God for making “*him for whom this bell tolls, now in this dimnesse of his sight, to become a superintendent, an overseer, a Bishop, to as many as heare his voice, in this bell.*”¹⁰ The process of dying as a Christian becomes an inspiration and object of contemplation for other nearby Christians as a community is brought into being spontaneously by the sonic field of the bell. Moreover, Donne’s characterization of the dying man as a “Bishop” implies the existence of a continuum between the spontaneous gatherings that happen to assemble around the *moriens*, the formal organization of the established Church and the mystical community of all Christians. In Meditation 18, Donne ascribes a place in heaven to the dead man, even though he has no knowledge of his character or circumstances, on the basis of his “*owne Charity; I ask that; & that tels me, He is gone to everlasting rest, and joy, and glory: I owe him a good opinion; it is but thankfull charity in mee, because I received benefit and instruction from him when his Bell told: and I, being made the fitter to pray, by that disposition, wherein I was assisted by his occasion, did pray for him.*”¹¹

The bell establishes reciprocal postures of care and responsibility. The dying man is enabled by God to serve as an informal spiritual leader, while Donne (as an ordained minister, an actual leader within the church) prays in return. The interaction between Donne and the unknown man is transactional in character, since each gives something to the other. But although Donne feels obligated to offer a return for the benefits he has received, he does not appear to deplete his own resources by praying for his neighbor. This is not a contractual exchange in which both sides gain something and lose something, nor does there seem to be any scarcity in the economy brought into being by the bell. Rather, the coming together of Donne and the dying man around the occasion of the bell tolling creates spiritual value that did not previously exist.

This theological tradition of associating dying and community aligns with contemporary expectations of how the deathbed should function in practice. In his discussion of medieval attitudes to dying, Eamon Duffy describes the deathbed as “a communal effort, in which living friends and relatives and dead patrons and intercessors join hands to assist.”¹² Though, as I have discussed, the patrons and intercessors drop away in a Protestant context, the sense that dying is something family and friends do together remains. Early modern *artes moriendi*, and other texts discussing expected or actual behavior in the face of death, generally assume, or try to simulate, the presence of attendants at the deathbed.¹³ In this homiletic tradition, as in Donne’s *Devotions*, the deathbed community is often understood as extending benefits to witnesses as well as the *moriens*.¹⁴ Thomas Becon’s extremely popular 1561 puritan text *The Sicke Mans Salve* makes this reciprocity explicit.¹⁵ The

Salve takes the form of a dialogue and opens with a gathering of neighbors, who discuss the sickness of their friend, Epaphroditus, and set out to visit him as an act of charity, “one of those workes which being done in the fayth of Christ shal be rewarded at the last day in the face of the whole world.”¹⁶ The text depicts these attendants comforting Epaphroditus and helping him to resist temptation through scriptural example and personalized advice based on their prior knowledge of his character. Concurrently, they also use Epaphroditus’s experiences as occasions for spiritual reflection on the brevity of life and the vanity of human aspirations. The *Salve* concludes with Epaphroditus’s death, and one onlooker’s observation “A Christen and godly end made hee. God geve us all grace to make the like.”¹⁷ Epaphroditus’s deathbed serves to strengthen bonds within a community of believers by instantiating a model of godly behavior that they can aspire to mimic on their own deathbeds. In this way, the *Salve* imagines a spiritual economy similar to that instigated by Donne’s bell, but locates it in the long-standing, informal, personal relations within an actual group of like-minded Christians.

The impression that the deathbed generates value for all concerned is maintained even when Becon discusses actual economic transactions. One of the obligations typically laid upon the *moriens*, especially in sixteenth and seventeenth century *artes moriendi*, is to disengage from earthly things by settling disputes and debts, and by disposing of worldly possessions and offices.¹⁸ In the context of a Christian will, the transfer of property is supposed to function as a contingent marker for a more important transfer of trust and care, for an exhortation to the beneficiary to mirror the *moriens* in godliness, and for a denial of the significance of

the very thing being handed over.¹⁹ All this is evident in Becon's *Salve* when Epaphroditus makes the following provisions for his wife:

Yea, forasmuch as God hath blessed me with worldly substance, & she is mine own fleshe, and whatsoever provideth not for hys hath denied the fayth, and is worse then an infidel, I bequeth and geve unto her for terme of her life this house wherein I now dwel, with *the* appertenaunces, and all the housholde stuffe contained therin [1 Tim 5]... Let this suffice for my wives portion, whom I doubt not God wyll take into his protection, & so provide for her in the time of her short pilgrimage that she shall want no good thing. Only I crave this at her hand, that she be diligent in training up my children in the feare & doctrine of the Lord. So shall God be unto her an husband, & to her children a father.²⁰

Epaphroditus is disposing of a significant amount of property, but is doubly insulated from having any economic intentionality with regard to it. First, his religious obligation to care for his dependents is rendered equivalent to the entire practice of faith and so loses all specificity as an actual financial transaction. Second, his claim that God will provide denies that wife's material support is actually in question here. Instead, the bequest becomes aligned with the assumption of Epaphroditus's bereaved family into a universal Christian community through union with God.

We can identify a similar understanding of deathbed and will as affirming and strengthening community in avowedly secular contexts.²¹ One prominent area of legal contention during this period was the creation of perpetuities. Perpetuities

are conditional clauses in property conveyances used by landowners to control the ownership and use of their land, and also the behavior of their heirs, beyond their own deaths. Typically the motive behind early modern perpetuities was dynastic. Landowners sought to ensure that the title of head of the family and the property attaching to the family remained together in the hands of someone worthy of inheriting their status.²² As in Epaphroditus's will, material property was understood to function as a signifier for expressions of love and for the perpetuation of a family identity.

However, when real money is involved, it is easy to see how these understandings of the communal deathbed could prove inadequate. Epaphroditus risks looking simply hypocritical when he outlines a settlement for his daughters saying, "If they be godly brought up, I doubt not, but if they live, God will abundantly provide for them. Notwithstanding I geue unto ech of them 200 poundes of good and lawfull money to be paid in the day of their marriage."²³ Perpetuities emerge as an issue precisely because they were so frequently litigated by plaintiffs seeking to decouple family identity and the material property being used to signify its perpetuation. Moreover, the terms in which the law reports discuss these disputes indicate that at least some contemporary commentators linked the issue of perpetuities to fundamental political and economic questions about the place of property in society. Edward Coke, one of the most prominent opponents of perpetuities, celebrates the judgment in *Mary Portington's Case*, in which a class of perpetuities was invalidated, by saying "the commonwealth rejoiced, that fettered freeholds and inheritances were set at liberty, and many and

manifold inconveniences to the head and all the members of the commonwealth thereby avoided.”²⁴ Coke advocates making real property more easily alienable with the consequence that it could more easily become an object of business deals and speculation.²⁵

But although Coke here is easy to align with a proto-liberal sensibility, and although the limitations upon perpetuities did increase over time, this trend cannot be understood as a simple, linear movement from status to contract, or from feudalism to a market economy.²⁶ Coke made his name in *Shelley's Case*, where a complex family settlement that would have created a perpetuity was invalidated on the grounds that a clause that devised property to a person “and his heirs” was equivalent to devising it in fee-simple, or without any restrictions.²⁷ Coke champions an ideal of unfettered freeholds and argues for the invalidation of complex family settlements, but he does so by exploiting an ambiguity in the concept of an heir. In Coke’s interpretation, a person’s heirs are simultaneously to be chosen entirely at his own discretion and equivalent to himself. To name an heir is both to institute a contractual relation and to effect a transfer of status founded on an intimacy that almost rises to identity. The different understandings of inheritance we find superimposed in the religious understanding of the communal deathbed have an analogue even in the purely secular context of the law reports.

II.

Jonson appears suspicious of common understandings of communal deathbeds and the arts of dying. Twice, the playwright refers to *The Sicke Mans Salve* in a manner that suggests he is uncomfortable with how it imagines and sustains

group identity. In *Epicene*, while the School of Ladies is looking for a text to read to Morose that might alleviate his afflictions, Lady Haughty recalls that her maid Trusty's "father and mother were both mad, when they put her to me... And one of them, I know not which, was cur'd with the *Sick Man's Salve*; and the other with Green's *Groat's-worth of Wit*."²⁸ As evidence of the text's efficacy, she calls on Trusty, who confirms that every night her parents "read themselves asleep on those books."²⁹ Jonson alludes to *The Sicke Man's Salve* again in *Eastward Ho*, when the newly penitent Quicksilver is described by his jailor as able to "tell you almost all the stories of the *Book of Martyrs*, and speak you all *the Sick Man's Salve* without book."³⁰

There are a number of commonalities between how the *Salve* functions in *Epicene* and in *Eastward Ho*. First, in each of the two plays, the *Salve* is paired with another popular text advocating moral reformation (and in the case of *Eastward Ho*, with another text canonical for reform-minded Protestants). Rather than paying attention to the specific content of Becon's dialogue, or the advice it gives about how to die, Jonson focuses on the role that reading it has in signaling membership in a devout community defined through familiarity with a particular set of texts. Moreover he intimates that the integration of individuals into such communities through texts can be constrictive and coercive. Trusty's parents are undergoing treatment for insanity; Quicksilver is confined and threatened with execution and therefore has externally imposed reasons to enact repentance. Second, in both instances, Jonson credits the *Salve* with heavily ironized, but real, redemptive powers – only in a social register rather than the spiritual one assumed by Becon.

Trusty's parents are actually cured of madness, if only by the soporific nature of the tracts they read and a quasi-magical understanding of the book as a totemic object. Quicksilver's repentance, if suspiciously self-interested and easily arrived at, is sustained until the end of the play and does finally win him mercy and a stay of execution. The efficacy of the tract is in some sense real, and tied to the way in which it enables those who read it to act like members of recognizable puritan groups. Finally, the utility of the *Salve* is linked to imperfect mimicry. By falling asleep, Trusty's parents enact the loss of consciousness of dying. Quicksilver, speaking the words of *The Sicke Man's Salve* "without book," turns Becon's dialogic work into an actual piece of theater. As a result, questions about the nature and value of religious communities created through particular texts shade into questions about the nature and value of artistic, and especially dramatic, production.

Dennis Kezar draws on these examples to argue that Jonson distrusts the *artes moriendi* for encouraging forms of insincere self-fashioning that are exemplary of "the pervasive histrionics of his culture," and that his skeptical allusions to the *Salve* reflect his more general suspicion of theatricality and socially constructed identity.³¹ While I think that Kezar is right to note that Jonson's references to the practices of dying show a concern with the hypocritical performance of death, he is misleading in the way in which he ties this to the fashioning of the *self*. The constrictive uses to which the *Salve* is put in *Epicene* and *Eastward Ho* imply that hypocrisy is visible at a more general social level, as the *moriens* is attenuated and forcibly subsumed into a community that controls what its death can look like and what it can signify. There may be intimations of a purely personal insincerity,

especially in the case of Quicksilver, but the dominant use of the *Salve* is as a form of social control or as a way of signaling submission to a particular communal perspective. This impression is intensified by the fact that the instances of Quicksilver and Trusty's parents drawing on the *Salve* are reported rather than seen. There are no selves onstage; the characters' performances of dying exist only as publically expressed approval of their conformity.

Allusions to Becon in the London comedies primarily support a satire of Puritan pietistic affectation. Jonson is most interested showing in how particular, identifiable social groups use conventional notions of the good death to exert social control. These particular satirical targets, and the precise cultural practices of dying appropriate to this London milieu, have little relevance in the Venetian setting of *Volpone*.³² Instead, Jonson in this play explores a more constitutive aspect of the Christian model of a good death – the notion that the deathbed generates social and spiritual value through the affirmation of communal bonds – and in doing so, suggests that the link made in *Epicene* and *Eastward Ho* between dissolution of the self into the social and into nonbeing is not purely contingent. There may be deeper reasons why the deathbed appears such an effective site of social control.

Volpone's private recreation evokes a fantasy in which death and community are linked together, and rejecting one is equivalent to rejecting the other. His preferred companions are a dwarf, a eunuch and a hermaphroditic fool, whose sung interludes are generically related to the anti-masque, and so to an impulse towards anti-sociality. The three are alike only in being definitionally unlike, all marked physically as abnormal and so united by their status as grotesques.³³ Mosca tells

Corvino that all three are Volpone's disinherited bastards, "begot on beggars /Gypsies, and Jews, and blackmoors, when he was drunk/ ...but he has giv'n 'em nothing" (1.5.44-49). His claim brings the trio into a wider class of the excluded existing within and against European, Christian society, and in particular links them to nearly contemporaneous Shakespearean representations of Venetian social others in *The Merchant of Venice* and *Othello*. Two of the three are presumably sterile, and when Nano and Castrato sing that "Your fool he is your great man's dearling, /And your lady's sport and pleasure; tongue and bauble are his treasure" (1.2.71-3), their relationship to Volpone takes on an erotic dimension.³⁴ As a consequence, Nano, Androgynio and Castrone are associated not just with social, economic and religious exclusion, but also with non-reproductive modes of existence and with relations between generations that stand in direct opposition to the notion of a legacy as a way of cementing a dynastic lineage or a family identity. They oppose biological change and death by at once incestuously superimposing generational positions and denying passage between generations through inheritance. They are a paradoxical, impossible community of everything that is anti-communal, and through them anti-sociality becomes associated with the evasion of death.

On their first appearance, Nano and Androgynio perform for Volpone's entertainment an interlude, modeled on Lucian's *The Cock*, that recounts the metempsychosis of Pythagoras's soul through a variety of humans and animals until it comes to rest in Androgynio's body. In the interlude, as in *The Cock*, the soul moves through a number of religious and philosophical groups defined by their beliefs and

their adherence to behavioral and dietary restrictions, and then breaks these restrictions in its subsequent incarnations.³⁵ The soul's survival and persistence across time is directly associated with its transcendence of communal identities – and the mechanism that allows such persistence and such transcendence to occur is drama. The interlude is carefully set off as a play within the play, and Volpone responds to it as a “very, very pretty” fantasy (1.2.63). His behavior in the first half of the play shows him attempting to bring that fantasy into reality through manipulation of his deathbed.

Volpone's initial description of his position indicates that, for him, the communal deathbed emblemizes the near relation between forms of collective existence and death:

I have no wife, no parent, child, ally
To give my substance to; but whom I make
Must be my heir: and this makes men observe me.
This draws new clients, daily, to my house,
Women and men, of every sex and age,
That bring me presents, send me plate, coin, jewels,
With hope that when I die (which they expect
Each greedy minute) it shall then return
Tenfold upon them; whilst some, covetous
Above the rest, seek to engross me whole,
And counterwork the one unto the other,
Contend in gifts, as they would seem in love:

All which I suffer, playing with their hopes,
And am content to coin 'em into profit,
And look upon their kindness, and take more,
And look on that; still bearing them in hand,
Letting the cherry knock against their lips,
And draw it by their mouths, and back again. (1.1.73-90)

Volpone opens by describing a hypothetical set of natural inheritors defined through objective, pre-existing and intimate relations to the dying person, and then contrasts them to the heir that he will “make.” He emphasizes his right to choose where his property will go independently from existing ties of family and friendship. But by focusing on the title “heir” rather than the action of economic transfer, he acknowledges that writing a will is commonly understood as a transfer of status. In this context, his description of his wealth as “my substance” is important because it suggests the consequences such a transfer has for the original owner. The phrase recalls the Roman legal sense of the word *substantia*, signifying “the entire property of a person... or... an inheritance as a whole,” and so carries a primary sense of Volpone’s material possessions.³⁶ Yet it also suggests Volpone’s actual physical body, and so indicates that naming an heir is paradigmatically the ratification of a familial sharing of substance in the form of biological inheritance. Additionally, the word evokes the Eucharist and therefore the Pauline notion of community based on participation in the Passion. Though Volpone stresses his autonomy in choosing an heir, it nevertheless appears that by bequeathing his substance, he will lock himself into a particular set of interpersonal relations which entail that his self is not

entirely his own, but part of a lineage and a Christian community. Volpone's claim that the legacy hunters "seek to engross me whole" further elides the distinction between his money and his person, and, with a suggestion of cannibalism that again could be taken as implicitly eucharistic, indicates the degree to which naming an heir and participating in a communal deathbed threaten him with a loss of self.³⁷

Volpone's lack of a natural heir throws open the question of how communal and familial associations can be created. Instead of a wife, parent, child or ally, Volpone is visited by an indiscriminate collection of "Women and men, of every sex and age," all of whom hope to become his heir through "their kindness" (1.1.87) – that is, through an expression of care that models itself on relations between kin and on Christian conceptions of charity. Yet the Legacy Hunters' gifts show they ultimately share Volpone's complex understanding of his substance and wish to exploit the slippages between the word's various connotations. By presenting offerings to Volpone, they hope to be brought into a relationship of virtual kinship as his heir. Their kindness, however, is no more than a cover for an investment that they expect to "return /Tenfold." Significantly, the phrase recalls Matthew 19:29, "And whosoever shall forsake houses, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for my Name's sake, he shall receive a hundredfold more, and shall inherit everlasting life." By taking the scriptural precedent literally (several legacy hunters do disavow family members for Volpone's sake), they in a sense do the opposite of Epaphroditus. Where Becon's sick man metaphorizes his bequests as signs of his faith and of the extension of Christian community to his family and friends, Volpone and the legacy hunters materialize biblical precedent as

economic exchange. They undermine the notion of the good death, not by overtly rejecting it, but by applying the precepts appropriate to it in strictly earthly terms under conditions of scarcity.

The legacy hunters' actions can also help us to understand where this scarcity comes from. The reasoning behind their gifts has been extensively discussed by Katherine Eisaman Maus. Maus contrasts Seneca's insistence in *De beneficiis* that the material gift is a mere signifier for the more important gift-giving intention with Marcel Mauss's claim that in archaic gift-giving societies, gifts entail an obligation to reciprocate. She argues that Volpone is exploiting "gift-giving's big loophole: the giving of gifts seems to necessitate a response, but there is apparently no way to compel that response to occur."³⁸ The Legacy Hunters can delude themselves that Volpone has an inescapable obligation to make a return – but to attempt to raise that obligation to the formality of contract would be to stop the gift from functioning as a symbol of love.

But what Maus does not consider is what happens when these unequal gift exchanges between two people are located in a larger economic and social context.³⁹ Volpone emphasizes the number of people who come to see him and discusses their relations to each other. By giving gifts, the legacy hunters do not only woo Volpone; they also "counterwork the one unto another," and their aggregate effect needs to be considered. The insistent expressions of love they offer to Volpone may reflect characterizations of the communal good deathbed as a shared experience where all work together and all gain together. However, the material benefits that are also being transferred at Volpone's bedside, and that are Volpone and the Legacy

Hunters' true focus, flow differently, in a way that reflects (and, yet again, literalizes by interpreting in material terms) the despairing underside of a practice of *imitatio Christi*: Christ's sacrifice creates an unpayable debt that demands servicing through imitative reciprocation but that can never be discharged.⁴⁰

We learn from Mosca that Volpone knows "the use of riches" (1.1.62) and spends his gains freely, so that the gifts the Legacy Hunters make to him never accrue into an investment for the eventual heir, but are instead wasted. Rather than being bound together as at a traditional deathbed by the opportunity for limitless benefits, the Legacy Hunters are united in a community of gift-givers by limitless obligations. Their recognition of one another as competitors is precisely what keeps their obligations open-ended; they need to keep giving so as not to be outdone. Volpone emphasizes the tantalizing nature of his practice when he describes "still bearing them in hand / Letting the cherry knock against their lips / And draw it by their mouths, and back again" (1.1.88-90). Yet Volpone himself, however much he tries to elide the fact by emphasizing his control of the fraud, is caught in the same pattern. The Legacy Hunters are attracted to him for a reason. His mortality is inescapable, and ultimately his substance will have to be passed on to somebody. Maus's reading of the dynamic of the gifts in *Volpone*, as intimating obligation without becoming contract, holds true for each individual gift but needs to be qualified by recognition of a wider gift economy in which obligations entirely eclipse benefits.

In view of this dynamic, a more suggestive model than Seneca's and Mauss's for the Legacy Hunters' gifts and the situation of Volpone's deathbed can be found in

Roberto Esposito's work on community. In order to define what community is, Esposito unpacks the etymology of the Latin word *communitas*, and notes that *munus* refers to a particular sort of obligation, "the gift that one gives because one *must* give... only the gift that one gives, not what one receives."⁴¹ Rather than a *res publica* – that is, a public thing that individuals own collectively – Esposito presents community as an unfillable void that threatens an individual's sense of self because there is no clear limit to the extent or nature of the *munus*. Members owe the community not only defined goods or services, but even their very being as individuals.⁴² The open-ended nature of this obligation means that ultimately, "the *communitas* carries within it a gift of death."⁴³

Volpone's account of the communal deathbed, where assumption into the community and assumption into nonbeing are made equivalent, emblemizes a very similar understanding. Moreover, it raises questions about how exactly the existential and material obligations Esposito discusses relate to each other, if and when they can be separated, and which has priority. I see Volpone's counterfeit as an attempt to neutralize the threat the deathbed represents – as what Esposito would call an immunitarian response through which Volpone seeks dispensation from his debts to others. In Volpone's speech, as in Epaphroditus's will in *The Sicken Man's Salve*, the flow of economic goods tracks the flow of more figurative and existential conceptions of the *munus*. When Volpone describes the legacy hunters, as I have shown, he evokes the Christian deathbed and familial inheritance ironically, and suggests that they are covers for economic self-interest. The transfer of property is what matters and everything else is just obfuscation. However, in trying

to separate himself from the community, Volpone in effect follows Epaphroditus in treating money as a signifier for other obligations. Volpone's reaction to the interest the Legacy Hunters show in him is to try to privatize his death, to take the very thing that threatens to destroy his self and refigure it as a willed action undertaken for his own exclusive gain. Volpone undermines the deathbed community by profiting from it in order to satisfy his own avarice. But at the same time, he cultivates avarice as a way of separating himself from the community.

After laying out the reasons for the Legacy Hunters' interest in him and the nature of their attentions, Volpone remarks "All which I suffer, playing with their hopes, /And am content to coin 'em into profit" (1.1.85-86). To suffer is to be in a passive state, subject to the predations of external forces. However, Volpone immediately recasts this suffering as "playing," and so as something that is under his control and reflecting his own skillfulness. By understanding what looks like passivity as a form of activity, he justifies coining the Legacy Hunters into profit for himself. It is worth thinking carefully about exactly what this activity is. The word "playing" signals that his behavior has something to do with acting.

To say that Volpone resembles an actor is not to say anything new. A number of critics have discussed the character's histrionic nature.⁴⁴ Often these readings align with Jonah Barish's diagnosis of Jonson's "anti-theatricality," and assume that this dimension of Volpone's character grounds an ethical critique of mimesis, where the protean figure of the actor is suspicious because it lacks a core moral self.⁴⁵ This reading is very plausible in the scenes involving Celia, where Volpone's interest in impersonation is aligned with his interest in sexual assault.⁴⁶ However, I want to

focus on the fact that Volpone's most longstanding imitation of the dying man sits oddly with this analysis and implies a more complex attitude to dramatic impersonation. Through Volpone's fraud, Jonson draws an analogy between arts of dying and arts of acting, but his main interest is not in unmasking histrionic counterfeit. In fact, the parallel points more emphatically to two quite different things. First, thinking about what people are doing when they are dying helps us think about what actors are doing onstage. And, second, the thing that actors *are* doing can be understood as an immunitarian activity that substantiates a core, inviolable self. This sort of immunitarian activity, moreover, may be portable to other contexts. Understanding dying as an actorly practice signifies not so much denying the existence of biological limitations to human agency, as looking for ways to understand and exercise human agency through biological limitations. As a result, Volpone's fraud anticipates later understandings of possessive individualism – that is, beliefs that personal security and individual rights are grounded in ownership of the body and of material property accrued through its actions.⁴⁷

Barish identifies two core complaints behind Jonson's anti-theatrical pronouncements: first, dramatic action promotes spectacle over words, and second, mimesis is hard to distinguish from lying.⁴⁸ But the impersonation of someone moribund, precisely because it is so minimal, can stand for acting in the purest sense – a sort of zero degree acting – in a way that complicates these objections. To start with spectacle: through Volpone's imitation of dying man, Jonson creates a form of performance that in one sense is purely spectacular, since it is largely non-verbal, but in another sense, because of its minimalism, explores the limits of how far a

performance can efface itself while still functioning as a performance. We see this when Corvino, who has been discussing Volpone's imminent demise with Mosca, worries that Volpone may have overheard them. Mosca demonstrates his patron's insensibility and nearness to death by shouting insults in Volpone's ear:

Would you would once close
Those filthy eyes of yours, that flow with slime
Like two frog-pits, and those same hanging cheeks,
Covered with hide instead of skin—[*To Corvino.*] Nay, help sir—
That look like frozen dishclouts set on end! (1.5.56-60)

Though the primary function of Mosca's words is to reassure Corvino, they also obliquely compliment Volpone on the success of his spectacular impersonation, his achievement of suitably filthy eyes and hanging cheeks. Simultaneously, though, the speech underscores the degree to which Volpone's ability to maintain his body in a posture of inactivity is crucial to the fraud. Mosca's words are effective only if Volpone sustains them by not reacting. From one point of view, it does not matter what Mosca actually says, because the purpose of his words is to demonstrate that Volpone is insensible. In consequence, they draw attention to the self-control that Volpone is exerting by refusing to react to provocation and to the fact that his posture of inactivity is a piece of acting. When discussing his fraud, Volpone frequently emphasizes the effort it takes him to impersonate inactivity. As soon as another Legacy Hunter, Corbaccio, leaves his bedside, Volpone exclaims "O, I shall burst! /Let out my sides," so indicating the difficulty with which he has maintained

his posture (1.4.133-34). Pretending to die, for Volpone, involves putting on a spectacle of the unspectacular.⁴⁹

Equally, Volpone's performance of dying is initially purely duplicitous. But it always has the potential to become reality, not because Volpone might choose to abandon mimesis, but because he might unwillingly be made to conform to what he has been representing— and his onstage and offstage audiences might not even recognize a change had taken place. This emerges from Volpone's account of his first appearance in court when his prone, seemingly insensible, body is brought before the judges as evidence that he could not have assaulted Celia. For the theater audience, this performance of incapacity looks almost identical to Volpone's earlier performance for Corvino. Yet on his return to his house, Volpone observes that “Fore God, my left leg ‘gan to have the cramp, /And I appre’nded straight some power had struck me with a dead palsy” (5.1.5-7). We belatedly learn that some aspects of Volpone's performance had an entirely non-mimetic significance for him. We have not only been watching an imitation of a sick man, but someone who might be becoming sick.

In view of all this, I suggest that Volpone's impersonated art of dying represents the full positive and negative potential of embodied, actorly, theatrical performance distinct from poetic text or authorial voice, and it is the nature of this performance that allows it to function as an immunitary response. The actorly effort involved in maintaining his bodily substance in a posture that is inactive, yet mimetic, is Volpone's self-justification for coining the legacy hunters. In a sense, he conceives of it as a form of work that entitles him to profit. Moreover, the cultivation

of inactivity also functions to immunize him from the community because it affirms that he has control over this substance and can prevent the community's encroachment upon it. A practise of dying modeled on acting (or vice versa) becomes less concerned with feigning a new identity than with affirming an agential self that is able to feign identities. To say this is not to deny that Jonson has an ethical critique of Volpone's avarice and duplicity. But alongside that critique exists a more speculative investigation of the practices that enable his avarice and duplicity.

Esposito in *Communitas* considers the sustained cultivation of immunity to be a particular feature of the modern era.⁵⁰ And following his lead, we might read Volpone's rejection of tradition in the form of Christian and familial deathbed communities as an indication of his alignment with modernity. I have already noted that Volpone's fraud depends on an understanding of possessive individualism, and on a continuum between his person and his economic substance. If we focus on Volpone's recasting of the deathbed community in an exclusively economic light, it is tempting to link him to emergent understandings of ownership as a safeguard of personal integrity.⁵¹ Volpone, perhaps, embodies an unusually early manifestation of just such a capitalistic sensibility.

However, my discussion of Volpone's counterfeit has also demonstrated the extent to which his attack on the notion of the good death at the communal deathbed continues to inhabit the practices of the good death at the communal deathbed – not just through cynical, parodic imitation, but through the appropriation of representational and behavioral strategies appropriate to it.

Volpone begins by subordinating other understandings of deathbed behavior to the flow of money, in a way that implies his project is one of demystification, and that the only material reality in play is an economic one. Yet in carrying out the counterfeit, he appropriates the conception of dying as an effortful action, along with the sense that different forms of spiritual, familial and economic inheritance can be made to track and signify one another, to justify his profit from the legacy hunters. This behavior reveals a far deeper homology with practices of dying well, and renders the question of which register of discourse he is attempting to control more open. In consequence, *Volpone* should encourage us to be more cautious about linking given postures to modernity as such. The plays shows traditional religious attitudes persisting in dialogue with secular ones, rather than giving ground to secular modernity, or being reappropriated for secular purposes.

III.

The ending of the play affirms the open-ended nature of this dialogue by showing devotional practices, economic activities, and secular institutions continuing to respond to and reshape one another. The *Avocatori* discover the fraud and hand down punishments to Volpone and the other miscreants for their perversion of deathbed forms. In doing so, they replace the traditional deathbed community with centralized, status-based and institutional forms of control. Yet their settlement reconfigures Volpone's counterfeit for their own advantage, just as his counterfeit reconfigured the traditional communal deathbed. In this process, the art of dying well is never entirely superseded, but persists in a modified form.

On the surface, Volpone succeeds in manipulating the court during his first encounter with it just as comprehensively as he manipulated the Legacy Hunters, and by using very similar tactics. The *Avocatori* are inclined to credit Voltore's account of events because of the pointed display of Volpone's inactive body, and because the Legacy Hunters, who are again placed in a position of having to donate competitively to a shared purpose when they offer their testimony. Mosca's comments on the contribution of Voltore – the would-be inheritor who has the largest part in the scene and whose "mercenary tongue" (4.5.95) has the most evident economic value – emphasize again that the obligations the Legacy Hunters are placed under, and the effort they put into fulfilling them, foreclose on any hope of return:

Now, so truth help me, I must needs say this, sir,

And out of conscience, for your advocate:

He's taken pains, in faith, sir, and deserved,

In my poor judgement (I speak it under favour,

Not to contrary you, sir), very richly—

Well—to be cozened. (5.2.42-47)

The speech is obviously ironic in tone. Mosca's circumlocutory style, apparently revealing his anxiety about speaking truth to power, is simply a set-up for the punch line. However, the joke acknowledges a usually unspoken reality. Words and phrases with religious connotations ("truth," "conscience," "in faith") recall the basis of Volpone's relation to Voltore in a supposedly Christian community, and so remind us of the communal obligations that Volpone is positioning himself against.

Consequently, there is a sense in which Mosca's insistence that Voltore must be cozened because of his pains needs to be taken seriously. Volpone's understanding of his separation from any community entails that the more a legacy hunter donates to him, the more emphatically Volpone must deny any obligation and must fail to reciprocate. Mosca's words provide a formal account of the principles on which the con is built, and suggest that he views the court episode as, in his words, their "masterpiece" – an intensification of his and Volpone's usual practice but entirely amenable to it.

However, as I noted above, Volpone's private comments about his appearance in court indicate that he does not share Mosca's sense that nothing has changed. The experience has rattled him. His cramp has caused him to doubt his ability to maintain mimetic self-difference between his posture and his reality. He explains the unpleasant effect the court has had on him by saying "I ne'er was in dislike with my disguise /Till this fled moment. Here 'twas good, in private; /But in your public—*cave* whilst I breathe" (5.1.3-4). The key source of Volpone's discomfort is having to appear in a new environment. By emerging into public, Volpone exposes himself to a greater level of scrutiny and a larger community than in the bedroom scene.⁵² But, more than that, he also meets with an importantly different type of social order, one that stresses fixed institutional and social roles over the private and informal cultivation of personal relationships. In the public court, power becomes associated with professional and official identity. The *Avocatori* are not named, and even Voltore appears in a new guise as a highly competent advocate speaking a professionalized language. Instead of performing for

an informal gathering of acquaintances, Volpone is required to expose himself to the scrutiny of persons in an official capacity, and the relationship he bears to his associates alters under this pressure. Most notably, he starts to collaborate with the legacy hunters, from whom he had earlier tried to separate himself, as all come together to offer an account of events that will incriminate Celia and Bonario. The two levels of hypocrisy Volpone had maintained at his deathbed collapse into a single plot to deceive in which the distinction between knaves and gulls is elided. Volpone's earlier manipulation of the community of the deathbed had relied on his control of shifting relationships between different economic, religious, social and legal discourses, which could be made to signify one another in more or less direct ways. In his account of the public court, these different discourses come together in a totalizing manner that is not susceptible to control. In Volpone's fear that his cramp is the work of "some power," the public authority of the court becomes aligned with divine sanction and with the inevitability of biological decay. Whichever way he looks, his agency is diminished.

The end of the play justifies Volpone's apprehension of the court and his belief that appearance in public marks a different and less controllable form of existence. Volpone's fears lead directly to his disastrous decision to declare himself dead, and this decision leads equally directly to his subsequent uncasing. The *Avocatori* end up in full possession of the facts of the case, and respond by punishing the wrongdoers and setting the innocent free. Echoing the association Volpone made earlier between public scrutiny and divine justice, the court implies its decision is sanctioned by heaven. The first *Avvocato* exclaims, "The knot is now

undone by miracle!” while Bonario notes that “Heaven could not long let such gross crimes be hid” (5.12.95-98). The court also associates itself specifically with religiously inspired control of the dying when it confines Corbaccio “To the monastery of San’ Spirito; /Where, since thou knew’st not how to live well here, /Thou shalt be learned to die well” (5.12.131-33). Moreover, this association between earthly and heavenly justice may be more than self-aggrandizement. Volpone’s punishment forces him to assume a position very like the dead palsy he worried about immediately after the first court appearance.⁵³ He will be forced to “lie in prison, cramped with irons, /Till thou be’st sick and lame indeed” (5.12.123-24). As in his earlier account of his fears, biological vulnerability manifesting itself through cramping, the public sphere, and divine justice all work together here to constrict and confine Volpone. At the least, there is a consonance between the specific manifestation of his fear of heaven and the reality of institutional punishment that starts to look like a cosmic irony.

On the surface, the *Avicatori* appear to reject Volpone’s bid for autonomy through parody and to reinstitute a more conventional good death of the sort that Corbaccio will be taught at the monastery of San Spirito. The court demonstrates a desire for stable, established social orders in which there is no distinction between seeming and being. Their punishments strive to confirm and stabilize social hierarchies and the group identities that will support these hierarchies. Volpone and especially Mosca, who has “abused the court, /And habit of a gentleman of Venice, /Being a fellow of no birth or blood,” are punished for impersonations that confuse their class positions (5.12.110-12). The fact that their punishments are

differentiated by status, so that the Mosca can be sent to the galleys while Volpone, “By blood and rank a gentleman, canst not fall /Under like censure,” suggests that the stability of such hierarchies is so important to the *Avocatori* as to constrict the form that justice can take. Voltore, similarly, is guilty of a causing a scandal to “worthy men of [his] profession” and consequently is “banished from their fellowship” (5.12.127-28). His crime and his punishment are understood in terms of his conformity to a professional group with a defined role in Venetian society.

Yet the essentially conservative nature of the values the *Avocatori* purport to be upholding should not disguise important differences between the expectations of the good communal deathbed that Volpone exploits in the earlier part of the play and the understandings of community implicit in the judgments of the court. As Volpone recognizes, what we see here is a movement from the private sphere to the public. Because Volpone *can* successfully counterfeit a *moriens*, and in doing so reveals weaknesses in the informal deathbed community supposed to help him achieve a good death, the court looks for a different mechanism to impose practices of dying on him and Corbaccio. The *Avocatori* make no attempt to revive the sense of a community that could assemble spontaneously on the basis of shared personal knowledge and a desire for mutual care. Instead, they turn to institutions. They deliver their judgments as official figures, and link their judicial authority to a wider matrix of state and church power when they hand control of the miscreants over to the Hospital of the Incurabili, an unnamed prison and the Monastery of San Spirito. Personalized, mutually beneficial communities of the deathbed are replaced by

anonymous institutions that have the power to cramp, to confine and ultimately to mortify Volpone and Corbaccio.⁵⁴

To say that the *Avocatori* possess the authority to force characters to conform to fixed identities through a managed practice of dying, and that the play even holds open the possibility that this authority is divinely sanctioned, is not to say that the *Avocatori* are themselves valorized as characters. In their deference to Mosca when he is still the presumptive heir, they display exactly the same venality as the legacy hunters. However, their personal limitations do not compromise the effectiveness and validity of the justice they deliver. Indeed, the fact that institutional judgment is compatible with personal moral limitations and economic self-interest may be exactly what ratifies their authority, and also what links their judgment to a broader political philosophy encapsulated in the myth of the Venetian republic. The capacity of prescribed political procedure to overcome personal interest is a recurring theme in Contarini's account of the government of Venice.⁵⁵ This ability to contain self-interest distinguishes the public, institutional control exerted through the court from the moral frameworks created by smaller, spontaneous communities that Volpone shows to be so easy to corrupt.

The *Avocatori* characterize as criminal Volpone's treatment of his own death as a commodity rather than a spiritual event or the legal transfer of a lineage. But instead of reaffirming either traditional spiritual community or the patrilineal family, the court implicitly concurs that death has an alienable material value when it expropriates Volpone's "substance" for the benefit of the "hospital of the *Incurabili*" (5.12.119-20). Importantly, the *Avocatori* use the same word as Volpone

himself did in his earlier account of his fraud, and draw on the same confusion between his body and his wealth. They then use that substance to replicate the postures Volpone adopted on his deathbed. However, where Volpone hoped to assert individuality, the *Avocatori* refigured his behavior in de-individuated, institutionalized terms. The money that Volpone has accrued from his imposture is to be transferred to a state-endorsed institution dedicated to the management of the chronically ill. Contarini lists the *Incurabili* as one of the “Hospitals within the Citie” without describing it in more detail.⁵⁶ In fact, the hospital was founded in 1522 to care for women, primarily (though not exclusively) those suffering from syphilis. Though it was not initially sponsored by the state, regulations dating from 1521 compelled begging *incurabili* either to enter the hospital or suffer banishment from the city.⁵⁷ Whether Jonson knew more about the hospital than its name is uncertain.⁵⁸ He might, however, have been inspired to evoke a hospital by the existence of parallel institutional structures in London. William Ingram notes that by the 1570’s, London hospitals had come under the control of the City, which supported them in part through fines levied on unauthorized dramatic performances.⁵⁹ At the least, Jonson encourages the audience to recognize a resemblance between Volpone’s earlier assumed position of a *morien*s and the positions of the hospital’s patients. In effect, the *Avocatori* have punished Volpone by taking the fruits of his counterfeit, and using them to generate and support more declining bodies (his, Corbaccio’s, the *incurabili*) out of the context of spontaneous deathbed communities and under the auspices of the Venetian city authority.

The name given to these institutionalized bodies, *incurabili*, reflects an understanding of them strikingly different from conventional representations of the *moriens* on the traditional deathbed, but perhaps more in line with the some of the ways Volpone conceives of his own practice as something that grants him separation from communal models of care. Rather than defining persons heading towards death (*morientes*), the word *incurabili* places emphasis on the failure of those it designates to progress; they are characterized by the fact that they will not become healthy, that they will maintain an indefinite state of unwellness. At the same time, if we focus on *cura* as a term for care with pastoral connotations, we could also describe *incurabili* as those who cannot be cared for. *Incurabili* stand in contradistinction to the *moriens* at the good Christian deathbed, who becomes a focus source of for earthly and heavenly care. *Incurabili*, like Volpone, are those who linger indefinitely in a state of sickness, and because of that lingering become confined to institutions, separated from traditional forms of community.

This resemblance between the *Incurabili* and Volpone suggests that Volpone's sentence is not just an ironically apt punishment or a convenient way to fill state coffers, but is in fact an intervention in a deeper dispute about whether the body is, or should be, a site of individual security or institutional power. It is very tempting to see judgment of the *Avocatori* as exemplifying the rise of biopolitics and of new forms of governmentality based on the identification and enforcement of norms for different social groupings and the forms of discipline specifically focused on the health of the body. In particular, it would seem to support Esposito's insistence that the notion of the body politic is not just a metaphor, but speaks to a

real co-implication of politics and health.⁶⁰ Volpone's status as a *magnifico* who engages in fraud and attempts to undermine social institutions such as marriage, the family and inheritance represents a threat the Venetian republic must immunize itself against. The *Avocatori* carry out this immunization by aligning Volpone with a group (the *incurabili*) who have been already marked as physically unhealthy, and who have been separated from the city in the institution of the hospital. Yet the way in which the *Avocatori* do so, by simultaneously turning Volpone into someone "sick and lame indeed" and relying on his substance as a source of funding for the separation of the *incurabili*, perhaps is indicative of the aporia Esposito notes at the heart of his immunitarian strategies. Inoculation requires exposure to infectious material; ultimately *communitas* and *immunitas* will always presuppose one another.

Volpone's own response to the sentence, however, attempts to assert agency through recourse to figurative language, in a way that suggests some limitations to Esposito's model. On being told that his goods will be seized and he will be confined until his illness is real, Volpone observes that "This is called mortifying of a Fox" (5.12.125). The multivalent pun on the word "mortifying" evokes, among other things, spiritual discipline in preparation for death, a judicially imposed death sentence, the process through which rotting flesh decays either before or after death, and the tenderizing of meat for consumption.⁶¹ Volpone is simultaneously alluding to understandings of dying as an event, and as a process that may culminate in death, begin after death, or continue through death in a way that denies special significance of the moment of death.⁶² Additionally, he is presenting himself both as

an individual with a social and spiritual identity, and as mere matter. Volpone through this pun emphasizes the multiplicity of ways in which his position can be described. As in his earlier parody of deathbed behavior, we see an over-layering of different sacred, secular and biomedical accounts of dying. Unlike in the earlier scenes, though, Volpone here is not attempting to use any particular mode of discourse as a cover for another. By highlighting ambiguity about what death is, he creates ambiguity about how it captures him. The pun retains an openness, in a way that perhaps leaves some space for resistance. Volpone may not be as susceptible to insertion into the monitory narrative of the *Avocatori* as they would hope. He resembles Faustus at the end of Marlowe's play, who, I have argued, shows up precisely through his attempted self-effacement, through the fact that none of the models of dying he rehearses can provide an adequate script for his death so that dying becomes an endless rehearsal of narratives of dying. Perhaps, also, the pun suggests that Esposito's insistence that the body politic and immunity are not just metaphors risks passing over an important field of interaction between individuals, communities and the state. Esposito emphasizes the totalizing effect of the structural equivalence between different immunitarian strategies. Volpone, by contrast, retains personal agency in the face of annihilation precisely through inhabiting a linguistic and conceptual slippage between different understandings of approaches to death.

IV.

My discussion to this point has focused on what Volpone is doing on his deathbed. I have analyzed the affinities between arts of dying and of acting so as to

characterize economies at work behind various social and spiritual practices with the hope of tracing the continued influence of arts of dying in supposedly secular contexts. However, a metatheatrical turn at the end of the play indicates that Jonson's focus is dual. He wants dying to stand in for acting as much as he wants acting to stand in for dying. The epilogue raises questions about what playing of the sort that we see in Volpone's deathbed does to literary communities. What is the challenge made to communities of authors, readers and auditors by a practice like Volpone's, and the assumption it encodes that material economies are not subordinate to immaterial ones? Can critical and readerly charity survive in the commercial theater dependent on such actorly practices? What would be the literary equivalent of an institutional settlement that would acknowledge, and perhaps try to immunize against, the realities of scarcity and of dissolution?

Jonson's prefatory Epistle to *Volpone* expresses the hope that an appealing form of literary community can emerge around the play. Discussing the denouement, Jonson claims:

And though my catastrophe may in the strict rigor of comic law meet with censure... I desire the learned and charitable critic to have so much faith in me to think it was done of industry; for with what ease I could have varied it nearer his scale but that I fear to boast my own faculty, I could here insert. But my special aim being to put the snaffle in their mouths that cry out we never punish vice in our interludes &c., I took the more liberty; though not without some lines of example drawn even in the ancients themselves, the goings out of whose comedies are not always joyful, but oftentimes the bawds,

the servants, the rivals, yea and the masters are mulcted; and fitly, it being the office of a comic poet to imitate justice and instruct to life, as well as purity of language or stir up gentle affections. (Epistle 100-12)

In this appeal to “the learned and charitable critic,” Jonson evokes a community that functions along similar lines to the good communal deathbed. Good critics will recognize both the rationale behind the catastrophe and Jonson’s control over it through their excellence in learning and their charity – that is, through their faith in Jonson and willingness based on a charitable understanding of human relations to assume that his motives are good. The play is thus an occasion for good critics and an industrious playwright to identify, praise and support one another through display of their respective virtues. Literary criticism, literary production and charity are aligned.

Though this allusion to charitable critics in the Epistle is passing, it conforms to a pattern that occurs repeatedly within Jonson’s lyric poetry. Stanley Fish has demonstrated that many of Jonson’s poems in praise of individuals strive to create a “community of the same” by asserting that the praiseworthy subject, readers and author all share values that are further magnified through the occasion of the poem. Significantly, there is no scarcity within these communities, even when the poems are in fact celebrating a relationship based on patronage. Fish shows that for Jonson, the poetic recognition of identity in itself produces value in a manner that sidesteps a zero-sum understanding; the virtues of the both the addressee and the poet continuously magnify one another in a manner that makes the poet’s receipt of patronage appear a benefit as great to the patron as to the recipient.⁶³ Evidently,

Fish's communities of the same resemble the idealized communal deathbeds I discussed earlier in the ways in which they affirm pre-existing moral codes and values, strengthen existing bonds within a community, and in doing both those things generate value.

Within the Epistle, however, the learned and charitable critic is placed in opposition to another group, those "that cry out we never punish vice in our interludes." If Jonson hopes to identify a circle constituted by charitable recognition, it only shows up in contrast to an opposing circle of antagonists.⁶⁴ Moreover, a linguistic shift over the course of the passage I have quoted implies that Jonson struggles to define such a charitable community within the theater as opposed to against it. In Jonson's presentation, the objectors define the works they dislike as "interludes;" they conceive of them as performances. Jonson, however, in his response emphasizes the textual nature of his practice. Ancient "lines of example" – that is, precedents that exist textually – justify his treatment of vice, and in following these examples he is acting as a "comic poet" rather than as a creator of plays, and certainly rather than as someone responsible for plays in performance. Though he holds out hope for the possibility of a positive literary community around *Volpone*, Jonson does not explain how such a community could emerge within the space of the theater, as opposed to through the text. Even the appeal to learned and charitable critics exists as paratext rather than on stage.⁶⁵ Consequently, it remains unclear from the Epistle how these hypothetical critical communities relate to the assembly of author, paid actors and paying auditors at the playhouse.

The epilogue spoken by Volpone does address these matters more explicitly. The speech questions what sort of community or public the theater is, and how it relates to judgments of the character of Volpone and his pretense of dying. If acting and dying are akin, what sort of theatrical institution could enable an audience to condemn the dying for profit represented, while celebrating the acting for profit necessary to the representation? The epilogue asks if the audience assents to the judgment of the *Avocatori*:

The seasoning of a play is the applause.

Now, though the Fox be punished by the laws,

He yet doth hope there is no suffering due

For any fact which he hath done 'gainst you.

If there be, censure him; here he doubtful stands;

If not, fare jovially, and clap your hands. (Epilogue 1-6)

By using the third person, the speech emphasizes differences between the actor speaking and the character he is embodying. We move out of the world of representation into what Robert Weimann would label presentation, as Volpone the character transforms himself into an actor addressing the audience directly on behalf of *Volpone* the drama.⁶⁶ Though this metatheatrical register is characteristic of epilogues, what is distinctive about Volpone's speech is how it (in contrast to the Epistle) points up differences between ethical and aesthetic judgments of the action. Volpone alludes to the legal judgment against him, and he labels himself "the Fox" as he did in his discussion of his mortifying. These echoes refer the audience back to the court's sentencing, and ask it to consider how its own position relates to that of

the *Avocatori*. The epilogue encourages us to question the degree to which the criminal or moral laws demanding Volpone's punishment and determining the specific mortifying form that punishment should take can be aligned with aesthetic judgments. In drawing together the judgment of the *Avocatori*, Volpone's characterization of that judgment as "mortifying of a fox," and the call for audience judgment in the epilogue, Jonson asks us to consider how the earlier analogy between acting and dying is manifested within a wider, institutional context. A consideration of the resemblances between acting and dying is replaced by a consideration of the resemblances between theater and mortification.

Moreover, theater does not only resemble Volpone's mortification in having an institutional character. The epilogue additionally suggests that drama results in postures of paralysis that, like Volpone's pun, are undetermined and maybe undeterminable. Volpone's final speech is cast in a subjunctive mode.⁶⁷ It does not assert that Volpone escapes the laws or audience condemnation; it asks the audience to decide whether Volpone escapes the laws, and also to consider the ethical implications of joining Jonson in moral censure of Volpone's crimes while enjoying and paying for the performance he has enabled. And what this results in, like the court case, is a mortified, and mortifying, state of suspension encompassing author, actor and spectators. The speech emphasizes the bodily constraint the end of the play puts on the lead actor who "doubtful stands" in front of the audience, and then links it through rhyme to the bodily constraint of the auditors during the play, who will shortly be released to move freely and, if they choose, to "clap [their] hands." An account of how the organization of the theater relates to the judgment of

the *Avocatori* is deferred, and also made contingent upon the specific exigencies of a particular audience and a particular performance. In this way, Jonson deals with troubling questions about whether he, as an author economically reliant on actors and paying theatergoers, is somehow implicated in the anti-social aspects of Volpone's fraud – not by evading them, but by asking for answers that will never seem definitive. Meanwhile, he leaves his protagonist standing, waiting to see what sort of critical community will emerge around him.

¹ The most important literary antecedents for the con are Horace's *Satires* 2.5, Lucian's *Dialogues of the Dead*, Petronius's *Satyricon*. For a summary of classical sources for Volpone's counterfeit, see Richard Dutton ed. in Ben Jonson, *Volpone, or the Fox* in *The Cambridge Edition of the Works of Ben Jonson* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2012) Vol. 3, 12. For discussions of the significance of avarice in *Volpone*, see Kathleen Eisaman Maus, "Idol and Gift in *Volpone*," *English Literary Renaissance* 35 (2005): 429-53; Oliver Hennessey, "Jonson's Joyless Economy: Theorizing Motivation and Pleasure in *Volpone*," *English Literary Renaissance*, 38 (2008): 83-105.

² Ben Jonson, *Volpone, or The Fox*, ed. Brian Parker (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1999), 1.1.33, 40-47. All subsequent references to this edition will be given parenthetically in the text.

³ In this, *Volpone* stands in pointed contrast to *The Merchant of Venice*.

⁴ In my characterization of these social, economic and political shifts, I am most indebted to the work of Michel Foucault, especially *Security, Territory, Population*, trans. Graham Burchell (New York: Palgrave, 2007), and Roberto Esposito, both *Communitas*, trans. Timothy Campbell (Stanford: Stanford UP, 2010) and *Bíos*, trans. Timothy Campbell (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 2008). As will become clear, though, I take issue with elements of both Foucault and Esposito's frameworks.

⁵ By describing Jonson as an "anti-theatrical" playwright, Jonas Barish set the terms of the debate about Jonson's relationship to the theater in *The Anti-Theatrical Prejudice* (London: U of California P, 1981). See also Alexander Leggatt, "The Suicide of Volpone," *University of Toronto Quarterly*, 39 (1969): 19-32; Thomas M. Greene, "Ben Jonson and the Centered Self," *Studies in English Literature* 10 (1970): 325-48; Mathew R. Martin, *Between Theater and Philosophy* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2001), 23-38; Gregory Chaplin, "'Divided Amongst Themselves': Collaboration and Anxiety in Jonson's *Volpone*" *ELH*, 69, no. 1 (2002), 57-81; Joseph Loewenstein, *Ben Jonson and Possessive Authorship* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002); James P. Bednarz, "Jonson's Literary Theatre: *Volpone* in Performance and Print (1606-1607) in *Volpone: A Critical Guide*, ed. Matthew Steggle (New York: Continuum: 2011), 83-104.

⁶ Romans 6:23

⁷ Romans 6:5

⁸ "*Boni bene moriantur quamvis sit mors malum*" [good men die a good death although death is an evil thing]. Augustine, *The City of God Against the Pagans*, ed. & trans. Philip Levine, Loeb Classical Library 414 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1998) XIII.5.

⁹ Augustine, *Confessions*, X.6.

¹⁰ John Donne, *Devotions Upon Emergent Occasions*, ed. Elizabeth Savage (Salzburg: Institut für Englische Sprache, 1975) Vol. 2, 123.

¹¹ Donne, *Devotions*, Vol. 2, 130.

¹² Duffy, 317. For alternative accounts of renaissance death culture placing different emphases on the transition from Catholicism to Protestantism, see Aries, *The Hour of Our Death*, especially 299-301; Ralph Houlbrooke, *Death, Religion and the Family in England*.

¹³ For example, *The Crafte and Knowledge for to Die Well* presents a series of interrogations to be made to the *moriens* by bystanders. If no competent bystanders are present, the *moriens* “must remembre hymself in hys sowle and aske hymself” (11).

¹⁴ *The Crafte and Knowledge for to Die Well* ends with prayers to be said “as the devocion & disposicion and the profyte of theym *and other that ben aboute hem*, askyn & requiryn, as the tyme well suffer” (17, my emphasis). Profit accrues to everyone present.

¹⁵ Thomas Becon, *The Sicke Mans Salve*, 87-126. For an account of textual and print history see Mary Catherine O'Connor, *The Art of Dying Well*, 195-96. For a discussion of the spiritual orientation and themes of the text, see Beaty, 108-156.

¹⁶ Becon, 89.

¹⁷ Becon, 126.

¹⁸ For a discussion of religious attitudes to will-making and the link between wills and the deathbed, see Lloyd Bonfield, *Devising, Dying and Dispute: Probate Litigation in Early Modern England* (Burlington: Ashgate, 2012), 22-25.

¹⁹ For example, Theophylus in Becon's *The Sicke Mans Salve* says “they whom the Lord hath endued with the goodes of *the* world should before their departure set a godly order and quiet stay in their temporall possessions” (97); William Perkins in *A Salve for a Sick Man* states that “householders must set their families in order before they die” and gives advice derived from scripture on the proper distribution of property (155); Christopher Sutton's *Disce Mori: Learne to Die* includes a chapter on “How the sicke shoulde dispose of worldly goods and possessions.” See Christopher Sutton, *Disce Mori: Learne to Die* in *The English Ars Moriendi*, ed Atkinson, 200.

²⁰ Becon, 98-99.

²¹ Useful histories of social and legal understanding of wills in Early Modern England include John Addy, *Death, Money and the Vultures* (London: Routledge, 1992); Houlbrooke; Bonfield. Henry Swinburne, *A Brief Treatise of Testaments and Last Wills*, (New York: Garland, 1978), is a useful account of testamentary law first published in 1590 and intended for a lay audience.

²² For example, in *Shelley's Case*, one of the first prominent cases to deal with perpetuities, the dispute centered around a settlement intended to ensure that property devolved to a male child likely to be born after the death of the landowner rather than to the female line. See Edward Coke, J. H Thomas, and John Farquhar Fraser. *The Reports of Sir Edward Coke, Knt.: In Thirteen Parts*. (Union, NJ: Lawbook Exchange, 2003), 1 Co. Rep. 93a.

²³ Becon, 99.

²⁴ 10 Co. Rep. x. Speaking about the same case, Coke also describes perpetuities as “a monstrous brood carved out of mere invention, and never known to the ancient sages of the law... At whose solemn funeral I was present, and accompanied the dead to the grave, but mourned not.”

²⁵ See J.H. Baker, *An Introduction to English Legal History*, 4th ed. (London: Butterworths, 2002) for a summary of early modern trends in the law of family settlements.

²⁶ This, in essence, is the argument of Henry Sumner Maine, who sees the development Roman testamentary law as exemplifying a universal historical shift from status to contract. See Henry Sumner Maine, *Ancient Law: Its Connection with the Early History of Society and its Relation to Modern Ideas* (New York: Charles Scribner, 1864).

²⁷ 1 Co. Rep. 93b.

²⁸ Ben Jonson, *Epicene* ed. David Bevington in *The Cambridge Edition of the Works of Ben Jonson* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2012) Vol. 3, 4.4.80-84.

²⁹ *Epicene* 4.4.98-9.

³⁰ Ben Jonson, *Eastward Ho*, ed. Suzanne Gossett and W. David Kay in *The Cambridge Edition of the Works of Ben Jonson* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2012) Vol. 2, 5.2.42-3. Admittedly, the collaborative authorship of *Eastward Ho* makes it impossible to be certain whether or not Jonson himself was directly responsible for this line.

³¹ Dennis Kezar, *Guilty Creatures*, 153-4.

³² Critics who have discussed the Venetian setting of the play and its relation to contemporary London include Jonathan Goldberg, *James I and the Politics of Literature* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1983), 72-80; Julie Sanders, *Ben Jonson's Theatrical Republics* (London: Macmillan, 1998), 34-46; Jonathan Gil Harris, *Sick Economies: Drama, Mercantilism and Disease in Shakespeare's England* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004).

³³ For discussions of the trio in terms of monstrosity and the grotesque, see Harry Levin, 'Jonson's Metempsychosis', *Philological Quarterly*, 22 (1943): 231-9; Jonas Barish, "The Double Plot in *Volpone*," *Modern Philology*, 51 (1953): 81-92; A. K. Nardo, "The Transmigration of Folly: *Volpone*'s Innocent Grotesques," *English Studies*, 58 (1977): 105-09.

³⁴ Dutton in the *Cambridge Works* suggests that “bauble” carries the meaning of penis here.

³⁵ See Lucian, *The Cock*, trans. A.M. Harmon in *Lucian II*, Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1915).

³⁶ Adolf Berger, *Encyclopedic Dictionary of Roman Law*, (Philadelphia: The American Philosophical Society, 1953), 721.

³⁷ Harold Skulsky discusses the pervasiveness of the cannibalism motif within the play in “Cannibals vs. Demons in *Volpone*,” *Studies in English Literature* 29 (1989): 291-308.

³⁸ Maus, 438

³⁹ In this, she departs from Mauss, who sees gift-giving paradigmatically as a collective experience. See Marcel Mauss, *The Gift: The Form and Reason for Exchange in Archaic Societies*, trans. W.D. Halls (London: Routledge, 1990).

⁴⁰ See Esposito in *Communitas*, 10-11. For an example of a seventeenth century thinker focusing on the inevitable inadequacy of responses to Christ's sacrifice see John Donne, "Death's Duel," in *The Major Works*, ed. John Carey (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990).

⁴¹ *Communitas*, 5

⁴² *Communitas*, 7

⁴³ *Communitas*, 13

⁴⁴ In particular, see Leggatt, Greene and Kezar.

⁴⁵ In fact, Barish is more willing than some of his followers to admit nuance in Jonson's relationship to the theater, seeing "an uneasy synthesis between a formal antitheatricalism, which condemns the arts of show and illusion on the one hand, and a subversive hankering after them on the other (*The Antitheatrical Prejudice*, 154).

⁴⁶ During his attempted seduction, Volpone informs Celia that he is "in as jovial plight /As when... For the entertainment of the great Valois, /I acted young Antinous" (3.7.158-61) and invites her to join him in Ovidian role play.

⁴⁷ I derive the concept of possessive individualism primarily from C.B. Macpherson, *The Political Theory of Possessive Individualism: Hobbes to Locke*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1962), 1-4. Macpherson situates the origin of possessive individualism in the later seventeenth century. However for suggestions that similar ideas can be found in earlier thought, see Richard Tuck, *Natural Rights Theories: Their Origin and Development* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979); Laura Brace, *The Idea of Property in Seventeenth Century England* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1998).

⁴⁸ *The Antitheatrical Prejudice*, 132-54

⁴⁹ It is possible identify parallels for Volpone's non-engagement in the advice *artes moriendi* give to maintain a heroic position of passivity avoid religious dispute on the deathbed. For example, as I mentioned in the introduction, Erasmus's *Preparation for Death* tells a parable in which two dying men are encouraged into theological debate with the devil. The man who attempts to defend his faith rationally is led to heresy, while the one who refuses to engage in debate is saved: "Agayne, whan he objected, howe dothe the churche beleue? Marye, quod he, as I beleue. How dost thou beleue? As the church beleueth" (61). The precedent for these postures is Christ's forbearance during the Passion. G.H. Cox suggests that dramatic representations of saintly and Christlike non-engagement within the cycle plays may influence the presentation of Celia. See G.H. Cox, "Celia, Bonario and Jonson's Indebtedness to Medieval Cycles" *Etudes Anglaises* 25 (1972): 506-11. Volpone, I suggest, is doing something similar in a parodic vein.

⁵⁰ "The category of immunization is so important that it can be taken as the explicative key of the entire modern paradigm... The modern individual, who assigns to every service its specific price, can no longer bear the gratitude that the gift demands" (*Communitas*, 12).

⁵¹ In particular, his behavior evokes Macpherson's notion of possessive ownership and Esposito's reading of Lockean property ownership as an immunitarian strategy (*Bios*, 63-69).

⁵² Various critics have noted how Volpone loses control as he moves further from home. Sanders, drawing on Jean-Christophe Agnew, suggests that “the act of crossing the threshold of his own front door and into the Venetian community... threatened the integrity of any individual, and Volpone as an oligarch in disguise, as Scoto of Mantua, certainly compromises himself in this fashion” (43). Christopher Baker and Richard Harp note that Volpone’s “immoral agency” fades and his vulnerability increases as he moves further from the bedroom. See Christopher Baker and Richard Harp, “Jonson’s *Volpone* and Dante,” *Comparative Drama*, 39 (2005): 55-74.

⁵³ Greene (339), and Baker and Harp and discuss his fate in terms of Dantean *contrapasso* (66).

⁵⁴ As many commentators have noted, Jonson is concerned with verisimilitude in the court scenes, and details such as the names of the institutions and the fact that judgments cannot be appealed are derived directly from Gasparo Contarini’s *The Commonwealth and Government of Venice*, trans. Lewes Lewkenor (London, 1599). See Dutton in *Cambridge Works*, 15-16. Furthermore, Dennis Romano suggests that power shifted in Venetian society during the Renaissance from vertically organized, locally defined communities, to citywide institutions and class identities. See Dennis Romano, *Patricians and Populani* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987), 152-58). Though the question of what level of knowledge Jonson actually had about Venice remains open, the play does seem to be mirroring actual, historical change in the city.

⁵⁵ J.G.A. Pocock suggests this is the reason for Contarini’s obsessive detailing of procedure in *The Machiavellian Moment* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003), 324-25. Goldberg also discusses Pocock’s claims about Contarini in relation to *Volpone* (76).

⁵⁶ Contarini, 189.

⁵⁷ Archivio di Stato, Venice, *Provveditori alla Sanità*, Reg. 2, folio 31r, 22 February 1521, m.v. quoted in Richard Palmer, “‘Ad una Sancta Perfettione’: Health Care and Poor Relief in the Republic of Venice in the Era of the Counter-Reformation,” in *Health Care and Poor Relief in Counter-Reformation Europe*, ed. Ole Peter Grell, Andrew Cunningham and Jon Arrizabalaga (London: Routledge, 1999), 85-98. Also see Palmer for a wider discussion of Venetian treatment of public health.

⁵⁸ Dutton suggests Jonson derived additional knowledge of Venice from his friend John Florio (*Cambridge Works*, 16)

⁵⁹ William Ingram, *The Business of Playing: The Beginnings of the Adult Professional Theater in Elizabethan London* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1992), 132-33.

⁶⁰ “Rather than being superimposed or juxtaposed in an external form that subject one to the domination of the other, in the immunitary paradigm, *bios* and *nomos*, life and politics, emerge as the two constituent elements of a single, indivisible whole that assumes meaning from their interrelation” (*Bios*, 45).

⁶¹ See *OED* “Mortification” defs. 1, 2, 3; “Mortify” 1, 6. This is also discussed by Parker, 5.12.125n.

⁶² Volpone’s wordplay evokes Augustine’s discussion of how the peculiarity of the word *mortuus* reflects the impossibility of grasping death. The adjective *mortuus* “*quasi ut declinetur quod declinari non potest, pro participio praeteriti temporis ponitur nomen. Convenienter itaque factum est ut, quem ad modum id quod significant non potest agendo, ita ipsum verbum non posset loquendo declinari.*” [is employed in place of a past participle as if to make a tense where none can be. The result of this is, appropriately enough, that the verb itself can no more be declined by us in speech than can the act that it denotes in reality.] *City of God* XIII.11.

⁶³ Stanley Fish, “Author-Readers: Jonson’s Community of the Same,” *Representations*, 7 (1984): 26-58.

⁶⁴ Jonson's poetry frequently evokes similar antagonists.

⁶⁵ See Loewenstein, *passim* for a sophisticated account of the different and changing ways in which Jonson uses textual apparatus and revision to refigure plays for readers and to assert possessive authorship.

⁶⁶ This terminology is from Robert Weimann, *Shakespeare and the Popular Tradition in the Theater: Studies in the Social Dimensions of Dramatic Form and Function* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1987). See also Robert Weimann and Douglas Bruster, *Prologues to Shakespeare's Theater: Performance and Liminality in Early Modern Drama* (London: Routledge, 2004) for an account of the liminal qualities of prologues that in many ways is transferable to epilogues and that has influenced my account.

⁶⁷ In saying this, I distinguish my reading from that of Jonathan Goldberg, who is inclined to place more emphasis on the fact of Volpone's persistence as confirming his escape from the laws.

THE ATHEIST'S TRAGEDY AND WHEN GOOD DEATHS COME TO A BAD END

The *ars moriendi* tradition assumes that death has an active component; we are doing something when we are dying. I have been arguing that the treatment of this notion in devotional writing has a significant role in shaping early modern notions of individuality, community and agency. Marlowe, Shakespeare and Jonson all draw upon the conventions of the arts of dying in order to theorize possibilities for human action in various spiritual, social, political and theatrical contexts. In making my argument, I have challenged critics who tend to downplay the importance of the medieval religious heritage to later thought, or who emphasize what is lost, and nostalgically mourned, after the Reformation. Instead, I have traced important lines of continuity from the fifteenth to the seventeenth centuries, and argued that even when Renaissance authors demonstrate awareness of historical difference between, for example, the presence of saints at the Catholic deathbed and their absence from the Protestant one, they often perceive that they gain as much from the ability to situate and contextualize different traditions as they lose from the destruction of a religious totality. Ultimately, I have suggested, the homiletic tradition of the arts of dying constitutes one important point of origin for modern conceptions of the individualized self, the modes of action proper to it, and its place within wider forms of social organization. Social formations that have often been characterized as new and linked to the emergence of capitalism, or the renewed

influence of Classical ideas (in particular the Stoic tradition), might also have significant analogues in past devotional practice.

At least initially, this influence travels in two directions. Just as Christian homiletic understandings of the good death offer useful analogies for dramatic writers, so theatrical death scenes also have an impact upon homiletic presentations of the good death. My discussion of *Doctor Faustus* indicates how the early histories of drama and of homiletic writing about dying are bound up with one another. I have also already noted in passing that homiletic prose authors frequently had recourse to dramatic dialogic formats both to model the proper interactions between onlookers and the *moriens*, and to represent conflicts between the *moriens* and the devil.¹ But I have paid less attention to how the relationship between theater and *ars moriendi* changes over time. From the 1580's onwards, just as the theater's economic and cultural prominence increased, prominent religious writers (including writers of *ars moriendi* texts such as William Perkins) increasingly started to condemn it as immoral.² By 1606, the Act to Restrain Abuses of Players had banned the naming of God and the Trinity onstage, apparently under the assumption that dramatic references to religious themes could only be blasphemous. It is worth thinking about why devotional and theatrical traditions diverge, whether the divergence is equally felt on both sides, and if it speaks to an actual incompatibility. The dramatic representation of the good deathbed is a particularly interesting test case for investigating these problems. Allusions to devotional practices such as *ars moriendi* within the supposedly secular theater might indicate a possibility for rapprochement between homiletic prose and drama.

Or alternatively, theater may ultimately render practices of dying mere performance in a way that threatens the basis of *ars moriendi* as a genre.

To explore these questions, I look to a late example of revenge drama, Cyril Tourneur's *The Atheist's Tragedy*. The play dramatizes the conflict between D'Amville, an atheist whose lack of faith inspires him to murder his brother in order to acquire his estate, and Charlemont, his patient Christian nephew, who responds to his uncle's actions by refusing to take revenge and waiting for providence to intervene. It represents the proper Christian approach to death in a manner that harks back to the homiletic tragedies and the longer morality play tradition, but is also highly attuned to the dramatic precedents and conventions for depicting dying that will condition an audience's perception of good and bad deaths on stage.

Through juxtaposing distinct dramatic modes, Tourneur, I suggest, investigates whether the very portability of good Christian deaths for figuring wider forms of agency has emptied them of their original spiritual content, and if theater might inevitably lead to such emptying. In striving to represent a good Christian approach to dying as sincerely as possible, while simultaneously exploiting conventions of dying for their theatrical effect, the play becomes a limit case that can help explain the rise of dramatic representations of *ars moriendi* along with the reasons why they gradually get abandoned or secularized. The very interest that playwrights show in the arts of dying for figuring different modes of action threatens to evacuate dramatic depictions of dying of spiritual content. Drama becomes incompatible with devotion not because it parodies or discounts devotion but because it takes the theoretical assumptions upon which devotion rests too

seriously and makes too widespread and frequent use of them. Where repetition of a religious ritual tends to strengthen that ritual, so that dying in line with the advice of the *ars moriendi* like thousands of Christians before him becomes a way for a *moriens* to participate meaningfully in Christian community, Tourneur's play suggests that theatrical repetition inevitably threatens to destabilize or eliminate meaning, rendering stage deaths parodic or void of narrative significance. Although it explicitly makes a case for Christian patience against atheism, *The Atheist's Tragedy* in fact lays bare and exploits a tendency to nihilistic iteration underpinning the theater.

I.

As background to my discussion of practices of dying, I first need to say something about repetition in *The Atheist's Tragedy* more generally. Tourneur's play is highly aware of its own literary context. As commentators have noted, it constantly cites and reworks older texts, drawing in particular on *Doctor Faustus*, *Hamlet* and George Chapman's *Bussy* plays.³ Some of Tourneur's adaptations show him engaging critically with the conceptions of character, or of appropriate moral frameworks for action, employed by his models. D'Amville's freethinking naturalism updates Faustus's heretical magic for a new intellectual climate; Charlemont's patience Christianizes and challenges both Hamlet's vacillation and Clermont's pagan stoicism. But even more striking are borrowings of iconic images, scenarios, and speeches, which Tourneur takes out of context and iterates to peculiar and distinctive effect. Where *Hamlet* presents the ghost of the father, *The Atheist's Tragedy* presents the ghost of the father, a comedy puritan disguised as the ghost of

the father, the son disguised as the ghost of the father, and a cloud mistaken for the ghost of the father. The play then multiplies explanations for these ghosts beyond Hamlet's alternatives of spirit of health and goblin damned, canvassing additional possibilities that they are misunderstood material phenomena, "mere imaginary fables," or stock types that can be adopted as convenient disguises when necessary.⁴ Tourneur does the same thing with the graveyard scene, quadrupling Hamlet's contemplation of Yorrick's skull, as Languebeau, D'Amville, Charlemont and Castabella all encounter unexpected death's heads or corpses that spur them to ponder mortality. And again, they do so from a wider range of perspectives than are found in *Hamlet* and while simultaneously engaging in activities as various as consensual sex, attempted rape, homicide and sleep.

Paul Cantor characterizes Tourneur's debt to Shakespeare by saying that for him, "*Hamlet* evidently consisted of one striking coup de theatre after another, and when he went to imitate it, he captured only parts and not the whole, giving us in effect *Hamlet* with everything except the Prince of Denmark."⁵ Rather than dismissing the play on these grounds, I want to consider the capturing of parts as a deliberate compositional strategy. The play reveals the various ways in which iconic aspects of *Hamlet* might function independently, and in the process suggests that repetition has two significant effects. First, the repeated appearances of ghosts cheapen the examples being imitated. In performance, differences between the costuming of real and fake ghosts would presumably be minimal, and without any such clear distinction, Languebeau's ghost disguise threatens to retroactively contaminate the gravitas of his original. Over the course of the play the ghosts

appear in increasingly less impressive guises. The actual ghost of Montferrers, is replaced by Languebeau's cynical adoption of a ghost costume, and then by D'Amville's delusional belief that a cloud might be a ghost. Tourneur is adapting a powerful dramatic response to mortality, and is interested in demonstrating the number of resonances his example has. However, he is also aware that this procedure may risk emptying out the original.

Second, the various manifestations of ghosts and pseudo-ghosts in the play link iteration, especially when associated with the devaluing of content, to established theatrical practices. Languebeau is inspired to disguise himself because "There's a talk, thou know'st, that the ghost of old Montferrers walks," and draws on dramatic conventions about what a ghost costume should look like in order to do so (4.3.58-59). When even characters within the play recognize that the original appearance of the ghost of the dead father provides a useful model for impersonation, the audience is given powerful encouragement to consider Tourneur's own reliance on past dramatic examples. In part, this is a comic strategy. It is tempting to imagine *The Atheist's Tragedy* forming part of some lost Jacobean equivalent to the *Scary Movie* franchise, isolating and parodying memorable moments from other, successful dramas. But along with emptying out *Hamlet*, the play also evacuates itself through recursion. As *The Atheist's Tragedy* progresses, comic parody threatens to give way to an exhaustion of meaning.

In adopting this compositional technique, Tourneur is conforming to a certain version of Baroque aesthetics. For Walter Benjamin, the Baroque is characterized by profound skepticism toward the possibility of transcendent

meaning – especially meaning that could encompass heaven and earth in a way that would sustain an eschatology.⁶ Baroque authors respond to this absence by mourning a now ruined past that could imagine a symbolic totality. In this context, “The highly significant fragment, the remnant, is, in fact, the finest material in baroque creation. For it is common practice in the literature of the baroque to pile up fragments ceaselessly, without any strict idea of a goal, and, in the unremitting expectation of a miracle, to take the repetition of stereotypes for a process of intensification.”⁷ Fragments are the remaining traces of a ruined worldview. Baroque artists hopelessly scrutinize and rework them in a futile effort to recover their lost coherence, but in doing so merely confirm the deadness of what they are inspecting.

In general terms, Benjamin’s framework could be applied to almost any seventeenth century tragedy. But Tourneur’s distinctive way of inhabiting it is to consider the similarities and differences between fragments as material and dramatic phenomena. His repetitions of the contemplation of Yorrick’s skull are simultaneously instances where characters take material fragments as occasions for allegorical moralization, and instances where characters themselves become literary fragments and so occasions for the audience’s allegorical moralization. Tourneur builds a *Trauerspiel* out of the disarticulated parts of other *Trauerspiele*. *Hamlet* is one ruined system he wants to contemplate mournfully through its detritus. In adopting this strategy, Tourneur links the perceived loss of cosmic totality to the development of dramatic forms, but he does so in a self-divided way. He alternately implies that there is something significant to be recovered from

disconnected elements of *Hamlet* and that procedures of dramatic writing and imitation in themselves tend to make any link to the transcendent harder to imagine. The elements of earlier plays he is most interested in assembling are fragmentary intimations of mortality such as ghosts and skulls. In such dramatic reworkings of *memento mori*, anxieties about the possibility of sustaining eschatology intersect with anxieties about the consequences of textual imitation. Material remnants of dying become continuous with narratives of dying in a process that might enable a play like *The Atheist's Tragedy* to depict the good death, but that is perhaps likelier to render *ars moriendi* purely dramatic.

The question I want to consider in the rest of this chapter is whether the play's depictions of embodied approaches to death also conform to this pattern of repeating and devaluing fragments. Alongside literary allusions, the play piles up corpses. And in many ways, the proliferation of bodies, like the proliferation of textual echoes, tends to cast doubt on the possibility of fixed or transcendent meaning in death, and render problematic the idea of a clear, imitable model for *ars moriendi* that could always remain sufficiently meaningful to offer a pathway to heaven. Some of the deaths in the play exemplify the citational composition method I have been discussing. Levidulcia, for example, commits suicide so as not to outlive her shame in an ironic, debased imitation of Lucretia that casts doubt on the original.⁸ But even when deaths do not have a clear prior literary analogue, the play frequently de-emphasizes dying as a singular, meaningful event by stressing the susceptibility of its postures to interested repetition and reinterpretation.

This tendency is evident from the first depiction of a character's mortality within the play: Borachio's lying account of Charlemont's death in battle. In order to provide a false report of Charlemont's end, Borachio disguises himself as a soldier returning from the siege of Ostend and gives a largely accurate narrative of a historical military action, at which Tourneur may have been present, in which Spanish forces suffered a reversal at the hands of the Dutch and the English.⁹ As a prelude to the later staged deaths, the play juxtaposes historically accurate accounts of deaths that have a reality outside the stage with a purely fabricated narrative of an exemplary death, implicitly raising questions about where dramatizations of dying lie on a continuum between real and imaginary:

 Their front, beleaguered 'twixt the water and
 The town, seeing the flood was grown too deep
 The force of all their spirits, like the last
 Expiring gasp of a strong-hearted man,
 Upon the hazard of one charge, but were
 Oppressed and fell. The rest that could not swim
 Were only drowned, but those that thought to 'scape
 By swimming were by murderers that flankered
 The level of the flood both drowned and slain. (2.1.59-68)

In this account, deaths proliferate and, in the process, their material causes and ethical significance become less readable. As the bodies accumulate, categories of death bleed into one another. Soldiers suffer overkill, "both drowned and slain," and the individual deaths are together understood to constitute a general death, "the last

/Expiring gasp of a strong-hearted man." Deaths are devalued as singular events and instead contribute to an environment of mortality. Moreover, they at once conform to a strong moral narrative and provide grounds for questioning it. Borachio describes the death of "enemy" Spanish Catholic troops at the hands the Protestant forces for whom Charlemont has been fighting. The characters listening to him, along with the presumptively Protestant theater audience, have reason to approve this slaughter. However, the defenders of the town standing by to protect the banks of the channel are described as "murderers," and in general the speech strives to evoke pathos for those who die in the flood.

Borachio recounts these real historical deaths at Ostend in order to lend verisimilitude to his false claim that Charlemont has been killed:

Walking next day upon the fatal shore,
Among the slaughtered bodies of their men
Which the full-stomached sea had cast upon
The sand, it was m'unhappy chance to light
Upon a face, whose favour when it lived
My astonished mind informed me I had seen.
He lay in's armour as if that had been
His coffin, and the weeping sea, like one
Whose milder temper doth lament the death
Of him whom in his rage he slew, runs up
The shore, embraces him, kisses his cheek,
Goes back again, and forces up the sands

To bury him, and ev'ry time it parts

Sheds tears upon him...

(2.1.71-74)

For Borachio's onstage listeners, the "slaughtered bodies of their men," the truly dead, surround Charlemont and lend credence to the story of his death. But the audience knows that Charlemont is still alive, so for them the procedure has the reverse effect. Borachio's lies about Charlemont make the genuine deaths seem less significant. Dying threatens to become pure narrative convention, like the stage ghosts I discussed earlier. The fact that characters know what a narrativized death is supposed to look like, and are able to employ this awareness instrumentally, threatens to empty out the category.

However, this image of Charlemont lying on the shore also associates him and his approach to death with the resistance of these kinds of empty iteration. Borachio describes the sea's repeated passage over the body. The sea re-enacts the drowning of Charlemont again and again, and so figures another iterating mechanism through which the meaning of the original event is altered. Yet in this instance the mechanism is shown to be imperfect. The sea is unable to subsume Charlemont entirely and eventually ebbs away. Neither is it able to reinterpret the event of his death to the extent that Borachio imagines it desires and erase its earlier violence; its rage is replaced by a mournful tenderness, but this remorse cannot bring the man back to life.

More generally, the question of whether dying is mere empty convention becomes focused on the character of Charlemont. In Borachio's account, Charlemont's imagined dead body takes on some of the characteristics of a person

still undergoing a process of dying. The eroticism of the sea's action recalls Marlowe's "Hero and Leander" and so evokes a dilation of the approach to death that strives to postpone the event.¹⁰ Conversely, the living Charlemont takes on some of the qualities of a corpse or a revenant when he reappears to D'Amville who expediently mistakes him for a ghost. From the moment his death is announced, Charlemont occupies a littoral zone, understandable as both dead object and dying person. He composes part of the mournful detritus that Benjamin discusses, and that I have been arguing Tourneur links to literary citation, and also stands as an individual who can look upon that detritus and attempt to use it as inspiration to perform an art of dying well. Through the depiction of Charlemont's orientation toward death as it stands in contrast to the deaths of Rousard and D'Amville, Tourneur explores whether the stage is capable of sustaining a meaningful embodied approach to dying, or whether dramatized approaches to death are as iterable as skulls and ghosts and equally susceptible to impoverished and impoverishing reworking.

II.

Tourneur grounds the intellectual and moral opposition between Charlemont and D'Amville in their different attitudes to dying. Though the incompatibility between the two characters' worldviews is total, their encounters with and stances towards death become increasingly important in defining their beliefs, and finally in effecting the hierarchical resolution through which Charlemont's understanding is validated and D'Amville's is discredited. Charlemont's faith is both articulated and tested by the appearance of the ghost of his father, who orders him to "Attend with

patience the success of things, /But leave revenge unto the King of kings" (2.6.22-23). The Ghost outlines the patient response Charlemont's Christian beliefs should entail, but as a representation of a wrong done to Charlemont's family, also constitutes his strongest provocation to reject those beliefs. Analogously, D'Amville's moral philosophy is articulated as a response to his conviction that "death casts up /Our total sum of joy and happiness," which causes him to focus exclusively on gaining wealth and perpetuating a familial legacy as the closest material analogue he can imagine to an afterlife (1.1.16-17). His ability to sustain this outlook is similarly tested (and found wanting) by the near-simultaneous deaths of his two sons, which lead him to reject nature as "simple or malicious" and to conclude that "there is some power above /Her that controls her force" (5.1.101-04).¹¹ In both instances, death inspires the characters to advance an ethical philosophy, but nevertheless remains the primary challenge to that philosophy.

Tourneur associates D'Amville with the belief that deaths are merely another set of theatrical postures to be iterated. This is first evident when D'Amville and Borachio glory in how successfully they have exploited probability and mechanical causation to murder Montferrers. D'Amville gloats:

Aye, mark the plot. Not any circumstance
That stood within the reach of the design,
Of persons, dispositions, matter, time,
Or place, but by this brain of mine was made
An instrumental help; yet nothing from
Th'induction to th'accomplishment seemed forced

Or done o' purpose, but by accident.

(2.4.105-111)

The characters' ingenuity is expressed on two levels. First, they have been able to kill Montferrers because they have successfully identified and manipulated the predictable ways in which he and other characters would react to news of Charlemont's death. They have successfully reduced those around them to "instrumental help." Second, they have arranged events so as to imply an entirely different causal chain, so anticipating how others will read the death for its narrative plausibility, its conformity to expectation. Both instances for congratulation are grounded in the assumption that events leading up to death follow regular and predictable patterns that can be imitated and repeated. The speech creates an association between the techniques of the citational playwright and of the intrigant.

And this citationality also characterizes D'Amville's approach to his own death. When the play dramatizes the insufficiency of D'Amville's perspective by revealing his lack of control over events, it does so in part by transforming him from an agent managing iteration, to an unconscious occasion of iteration. D'Amville's despair in the graveyard evokes Faustus's plea in his final soliloquy that the stars will "Now draw up Faustus like a foggy mist /Into the entrails of yon laboring cloud, /That when you vomit forth into the air /My limbs may issue from your smoky mouths, /So that my soul may but ascend to heaven."¹² Overcome with guilt for his part in the murder of his brother, D'Amville expresses a desire for annihilation: "O were my body circumvolved /Within that cloud, that when the thunder tears /His passage open, it might scatter me /To nothing in the air" (4.3.248-51). Indeed, he

repeats the conceit twice since he first mistakes that same cloud for the ghost of his brother:

O behold!

Yonder's the ghost of old Montferrers in

A long white sheet, climbing yond lofty mountain

To complain to Heav'n of me. Montferrers!

'Pox o' fearfulness. 'Tis nothing but

A fair white cloud" (4.3.230-34).

D'Amville here imagines the ghost following the same trajectory, ascending to heaven and then abruptly dissolving into a mere natural phenomenon. His own imitation of Faustus, therefore, is marked as secondary and derivative to his brother's even within the context of the play.

Moreover, Tourneur again exploits the deflating effect of importing dramatic elements into new settings and repeating them in order to diminish D'Amville. In *Doctor Faustus* these lines form part of their speaker's desperate search for a belief system that will allow him to escape hell, which ends with the appearance of Mephistophilis to lead Faustus offstage. The soliloquy and the denouement of Marlowe's play are an integrated whole that links Faustus's final posture of despairing philosophizing to his damnation. In *The Atheist's Tragedy*, unlike in *Faustus*, D'Amville's speech does not build into a sustained approach to death, but rather is followed by a wrenching change of direction. D'Amville is abruptly cut off by the entry of Languebeau and the watch. The atheist then confuses the puritan, who is presumably wearing dark colors, with "Black Beelzebub /And all his hell

hounds" (4.3.252-53). Languebeau himself is an entirely prosaic figure, a jarring intrusion from the milieu of city comedy into the tragedy, and his exchange with D'Amville also renders the atheist and his despairing mental distraction (which the *Faustus* allusion had lent a momentary gravitas to) comic. Moreover, this comedy is predicated upon audience expectation that a Faustus analogue should be led offstage by devils. Tourneur acknowledges a generic imperative, and shows how it has a deflating effect when replicated in a different context. Again, iteration is associated with theatricality and the replicable nature of conventions of theatrical impersonation, since D'Amville's mistake is based on confusion of the stock Puritan costume for the stock devil one. The atheistic approach to death seems of a piece with citational dramatic technique, and both apparently stand in opposition to the possibility of a meaningful spiritual practice of dying well.

The question is whether Charlemont can offer anything better. At the least, he tries to do something different. His patience places him at odds with the revenge tragedy tradition and the forms of literary repetition that Tourneur has been exploring. Where, as I have noted, other characters consciously or unconsciously invoke earlier plays, Charlemont pointedly refuses to reenact *Hamlet*, rejecting the notion that he has an obligation to revenge his father. "The peace of conscience" makes living and dying a matter of indifference to him (5.2.159). As he is preparing for execution, he casts his calm demeanor as a valiant form of action:

Thus, like a warlike navy on the sea,
Bound through the stormy troubles of this life
And now arrived upon the armèd coast,

In expectation of the victory
Whose honour lies beyond this exigent,
Through mortal danger, with an active spirit,
Thus I aspire to undergo my death. (5.2.122-29)

Charlemont here asserts that accepting death is heroic, and he does so, like the *ars moriendi* authors by identifying an “active spirit” underlying passive postures of weakness and resignation in the face of death.¹³

Yet Charlemont’s approach is also subject to iteration. Castabella mirrors his aspiration to die patiently by leaping up onto the scaffold after him. In an orthodox Christian reading, this repetition marks Charlemont’s action not so much a matter of unusual individual heroism as the natural consequence of faith and virtue and therefore as exemplifying an *ars moriendi* to which all Christians might aspire. Furthermore, the mirrored action creates Christian community; Charlemont and Castabella, the couple who were prevented from marrying in life, will be united with each other and with Christ in death. Here, in theory, is repetition working to reinforce ritual rather than to render it empty. Yet, in dramatic terms, Castabella’s loving, pious mirroring does not seem so easily separable from the other forms of repetition I have been discussing, and there is potentially even something comic about the successive leaps. Significantly, Castabella also accounts for their actions, but in terms slightly different to those used by Charlemont:

Our lives cut off
In our young prime of years are like green herbs
Wherewith we strew the hearses of our friends;

For as their virtue gathered when th'are green
Before they wither or corrupt, is best,
So we in virtue are the best for death
While yet we have not lived to such an age
That the increasing canker of our sins
Hath spread too far upon us. (5.2.131-39)

By drawing an explicit contrast between virtue and sin, Castabella emphasizes the Christian framework for her behavior more strongly than Charlemont had. Yet her image makes it harder for their deaths to be seen as active or heroic. The pair become herbs, funereal objects that seem likely to be subject to just the same forms of mournful contemplation and reworking that I had been discussing earlier. Even if Tourneur is sincerely attempting to differentiate between worldly patterns of theatrical repetition and the godly repetition of *ars moriendi*, it is unclear what could render that distinction absolute. It is difficult to draw a firm line between parodic variation on *Hamlet* and oppositional rejection of *Hamlet* or to imagine what Charlemont could do within a revenge tragedy to place himself entirely outside the logic of revenge tragedy.

Complicating matters, the play adds a third option. Alongside atheistic and Christian forms of repetition in dying, the play depicts the merely biological death, and associates it with a third form of repetition, the iteration of cries of pain. This comes across most strongly in the depiction of the death of Rousard. Both atheist and Christian characters attempt to explain the death philosophically. It becomes the occasion for the Doctor and D'Amville to debate material and divine causation.

However, the intrusion of Rousard's cries into this dialogue also mark the debate as beside the point and suggests an embodied approach to death that is independent from either material or Christian rationalization.

In the death of Rousard, Tourneur spotlights the process of dying, stripped of individuating circumstance or details. We know that Rousard is suffering a sickness, but not what that sickness is, and there are no other actors promoting or retarding his death to complicate what we are looking at.¹⁴ This is dying as pure biological process. Rousard's death is expressed through cries, which appear in the text as the syllable "O." There are a few different ways in which we might understand these. In *The Body in Pain*, Elaine Scarry identifies an antagonism between pain and communication since pain frays the connection between the sufferer and the world:

For the person whose pain it is, it is 'effortlessly' grasped... while for the person outside the sufferer's body, what is 'effortless' is *not* grasping it...

Physical pain does not simply resist language but actively destroys it, bringing about an immediate reversion to a state anterior to language, to the sounds and cries a human being makes before language is learned."¹⁵

For Scarry, the progress of pain is a destructive and regressive phenomenon, something that is opposed in particular to aesthetic creation. In this model, Rousard's groans are preverbal markers of the fact that he is no longer a member of the language-based social community the play is depicting.¹⁶ He cannot be performing emptying repetition because he is already emptied of narrative meaning.

By contrast, *ars moriendi* authors at least canvass the possibility that groans may have significance, though the nature of that significance is unclear. Jeremy Taylor, for instance, insists that nonverbal sounds of themselves are not necessarily instances of impatience, saying:

Sighes and groans, sorrow and prayers, humble complaints, and dolorous expressions are the sad accents of a sick mans language; for it is not to be expected that a sick man should act a part of patience with a countenance like an Orator, or grave like a Dramatick person. It were well if all men could bear an exteriour decencie in their sicknesse, and regulate their voice, their face, their discourse and all their circumstances by the measures, and proportions of comlinesse and satisfaction to all the standers by. But this would better please them than assist him; the sick man would do more good to others, than he would receive to himself.¹⁷

The outcries of the sick are appropriate to the position of the sick, and the very distastefulness that they may have to bystanders is indicative of the dying person's growing separation from ordinary modes of expression. The *moriens* is now addressing himself primarily to God, who will understand and pity his position. The lack of meaning these sounds have for bystanders may in itself be a marker of their true communicative efficacy. Yet there are also limits to the allowances that can be made for the vocalizations of the dying. Taylor insists it is important to avoid "peevisshnesse... This sins against civility, and that necessary decency, which must be used toward the ministers and assistants."¹⁸ Taylor's view would imply that Rousard's groans could constitute a deliberate, embodied practice of dying either

well or badly, though not necessarily one that onlookers will be able to comprehend. Interestingly, Taylor characterizes the noises of the dying in part by opposing them to dramatic forms of speech. Though he and Scarry disagree on whether non-verbal sounds are communicative, they concur that they are not aesthetic.

In fact, Rousard's approach to death has both communicative and noncommunicative dimensions, and slips between something that might be better understood in Scarry's terms and in Taylor's. The formal relationship between his cries and the verbal dialogue is significant. At times Rousard's "O"s are necessary to the scansion of the verse:

D'AMVILLE Go call a surgeon.

ROUSARD (*within*) O.

D'AMVILLE What groan was that? (5.1.52)

At other times they interrupt the verse form.

D'AMVILLE How does my elder son? The sound came from
His chamber.

SERVANT He went sick to bed, my lord.

ROUSARD (*within*) O.

D'AMVILLE The cries of mandrakes never touched the ear
With more sad horror than this voice does mine.

.....

O bury not the pride of that great action

Under the fall and ruin of itself. (5.1.53-57, 82-83)

Rousard's varying position inside and outside of the verse, alternatively completing lines and breaking them, reflects the uncertain status of his cries as both verbal signifiers of pain existing alongside other signifiers and nonverbal background noises that have no place in the dialogue. The cries are also partially brought into contact with dialogue when other characters (and in this scene, significantly, exclusively D'Amville) make use of the same syllable "O" as an exclamation.¹⁹ These points of contact, however, never rise to a complete integration of the two modes of expression. D'Amville states that his son's groans resemble "The cries of mandrakes" and that "His gasping sighs are like the falling noise /Of some great building when the groundwork breaks. On these two pillars stood the stately frame /And architecture of my lofty house" (5.1.56,75-78). His reactions demonstrate his affection for his son, or at least for the dynastic ambition that he represents, but also express alienation or revulsion from him insofar as he has now become an emblem of death, like a mandrake or a crashing building. Death lays bare and affirms interpersonal relations but also inspires a disavowal of the dying person, who death starts to transform into something less appealing.

Just as they have an uneasy relation to dialogue, so death cries are also shown to be at odds with progressive narrative. Rousard's death is associated with ostentatious gestures of unveiling that can ultimately say nothing about the biological event. When the scene begins, Rousard is "within," and his groans from offstage are spatially separated from the onstage action. However, soon his bed is moved onstage and then, at D'Amville's request, the curtains are pulled back to reveal the person lying there. This is a performance of revelation. Rousard is

pointedly brought forward to be the focus of attention. However, this procedure does not enlighten either characters or audience about what he is doing when he is dying. Rousard continues to cry out as before, and his final death groan looks no different on the page from his earlier ones. His actual death is met initially with a bare verbal confirmation. The doctor and the servants together pronounce “He’s dead,” interrupting D’Amville’s meditation on whether nature can save his sons. Superficially, the choral statement appears redundant. It does no more than name what has just occurred on stage. Death seems to have rather clumsily arrested narrative. In actuality, though, a confirmation is necessary because of the way in which the death has been dramatized through cries. Without it, there would be no way to recognize the death groan as final. Rousard’s cries represent both progression towards death and static repetition that emphasizes the difficulty of understanding why and how the end occurs at the precise moment it does.

Rousard’s repeated “O” therefore adds a further wrinkle to the different functions repetition has in generically self-conscious theater and in ritualized practices of dying. Earlier, I suggested that the multiplication of ghosts and skulls demonstrates the portability of prior literary examples and the extent to which they can be expediently refashioned. In a way, death cries would seem to be another instance of this. The crying of “O” to signal a death is perhaps even better established theatrical convention than the others I had previously been discussing (a fact that challenges both Scarry and Taylor’s assumption that groans are antipathetic to literature). “O” can certainly become a joke, as when Francis Beaumont parodies theatrical death in *The Knight of the Burning Pestle*, by having

Rafe's last speech end "Oh, oh, oh, etc."²⁰ But, in fact, I think that the repetition of "O" functions differently to (though no less theatrically than) these earlier repetitions because, as Scarry argues, there remains something anti-communicative about it. "O" registers an absence. If it speaks anything, it speaks a lack of meaning, and marks death as that about which nothing can be said. It therefore cannot be easily be instrumentalized or repurposed to meet characters immediate needs or to reflect their specific points of view in the same way that I have been arguing ghosts and skulls or verbalized approaches to death can.²¹

Therefore, rather than functioning as an occasion for theater to empty an established image of content through repetition, Rousard's "O" suggests theater may be repetitious and empty of content in its very nature. The death groan of "O" is an opportunity for player to evoke the experiences of a character through sound independent of any particular verbal content and to exhibit the range of his ability in the process. Consequently, it represents acting as embodied performance, removed from any particular plot and from the text of a playwright. But the conventional nature of "O" as a death groan also encapsulates the limitation of acting as a practice of imitation, since it points to the differences between representing dying and dying in fact. One thing an actor can never do onstage is actually die. Superficially, the death of Rousard is presented as occasion against which to test Christian and atheistic understandings of mortality. But in fact, it threatens to overshadow the debate and reveal a third distinct way to understand dying, which intimates that theater is not a site of devotional ritual reenactment, nor of debasing, parodic

iteration, but instead a bare repetition of postures and sounds standing in for something unnarratable.

III.

These three modes of representing the approach to death are brought together in the final catastrophe, when the opposition between D'Amville and Charlemont resolves into a single unified action conclusively affirming a hierarchical relationship between their respective belief systems. If the accident can be said to have an immediate material cause, it is that D'Amville has been driven to distraction by Charlemont's patience in the face of execution and loses control of his body.²² Charlemont's practice of Christian *ars moriendi* of itself destroys his enemy and appears almost sufficient to win him an earthly redemption from death. D'Amville's attempt to avoid death through inflicting it on another is refigured as a cautionary example of a reprobate's *mors improvisa*. Indeed, D'Amville even registers the fact that his stance is becoming a debased reflection of his nephew's when he tells Charlemont that "at the reflection of /Thy courage my cold fearful blood takes fire, /And I begin to emulate thy death" (5.2.217-19). What looks like good Christian dying turns out to be a means of living, while what looks like a worldly mastery or denial of death turns out to be a bad way to die. The denouement of the play harks back to the model of the homiletic tragedies, where death functions as a conclusive affirmation of the superiority of a Godly perspective to an ungodly one.²³ The swing of the axe with which D'Amville hopes to kill Charlemont rebounds (literally) upon him and signals a greater providential pattern governing the drama.

Like D'Amville's murder of Montferrers, the atheist's death needs to be read on a mechanical causal level, and also as revealing a deeper intentional narrative.²⁴ The action is pointedly improbable and almost entirely resists any logical explanation. But through this improbability, it strongly affirms another type of causation – divine intervention – and with it, the assumption that death can be narrativized. Robert Ornstein and G.F. Waller both note that the event evokes an exemplary historical precedent.²⁵ Tourneur could be recalling Christopher Marlowe's death by a self-inflicted knife wound, cited in Thomas Beard's *The Theater of God's Judgments* as an instance of marvelously appropriate divine punishment of an atheist, where "the justice of God [did] most notably appeare, in that he compelled his own hand which had written those blasphemies, to be the instrument to punish him, and that in his braine, which had devised the same."²⁶ As an analogue of Marlowe's end, D'Amville's death is legible and iterable. Yet legibility and iterability are precisely the qualities that D'Amville has been able to manipulate, and that the play as a whole has associated with the emptying out of examples and with skepticism of a universal eschatology. In consequence, the earlier part of *The Atheist's Tragedy* stands potentially at odds with the denouement, and casts doubt on the conclusive nature of the ending, or the ability of providentialistic narrative to separate itself entirely from citational practices that have become associated with atheism.

Moreover, once more, the play uses a nonverbal cry to open up an evaluative space between the actions that bring about D'Amville's death and the moral that can be drawn from it. And again this cry casts dying as meaningless and non-narrative

and so threatens to overshadow both the scarcely believable providential outcome and the relativistic, open-ended patterns of dramatic imitation and iteration that threaten to render it ironic. Tourneur's printed script fractures D'Amville's fatal accident into three overlapping textual representations:

D'AMVILLE I ha' the trick on 't, nephew. You shall see

How eas'ly I can put you out of pain. O!

*As he raises up the axe, [D'Amville] strikes out his own brains. [He]
staggers off the scaffold*

EXECUTIONER In lifting up the axe, I think h'as knocked

His brains out. (5.2.238-41)

D'Amville's taunting of Charlemont is interrupted by the exclamation "O!" presumably a cry of pain and shock at the wound he has inflicted on himself. The "O!" is the most immediate reflection of the deathblow, a non-voluntary response to the injury. By itself, it offers no indication of what has occurred even at a physiological level, and certainly does not provide enough information for the reader to interpret the death as a moral example. The stage direction then supplements and interprets the "O!" by providing a mechanical explanation for what has occurred. For a reader, what is disorienting about this presentation is that the audible response precedes the action that causes it. The single action of D'Amville's axe stroke, which is supposed to unite and reverse the fates of the play's primary antagonists, is split into a sonic manifestation of the immediate embodied experience of the action, which does not interpret it, and an externalized mechanical

explanation of the same event. The death itself falls unrepresentably into the space between the cry and the stage direction.

For a theater audience watching the play, the stage direction would presumably be enacted in tandem with the dialogue, so that this precise bifurcation would not be apparent. However, the Executioner's response would nevertheless have almost the same splitting effect. The Executioner provides an incredulous verbal narration of the event that has just occurred. As in the case of Rousard's death, verbal confirmation may be necessary in part because of the difficulty of staging D'Amville's action in any convincing way. Words validate the audience's perception of what has taken place. But the fact that such validation is required draws attention to the implausibility and uncertain meaning of the event. Importantly, the Executioner's incredulity is directed not towards the moral significance of the axe stroke as an indication of the presence of the divine in the world, but towards the mechanical action itself. What exactly just happened?

Immediately after the Executioner's comments, characters representing the entire moral spectrum of the play – from D'Amville himself, to the imperfect human Judges who have cooperated in the execution, to Charlemont – unite to affirm the spiritual significance of D'Amville's mortal injury. The characters, at least, overcome any embarrassment or disbelief occasioned by the potential absurdity of the event by subordinating the physical order of occurrences entirely to their metaphysical significance. They remove D'Amville's demise from a biological register into an emblematic one, where the very implausibility of what has happened validates its status as divine intervention.²⁷ But before the play arrives at the providentialist

reading of D'Amville's condemnation in the theater of God's judgment, it presents a moment of doubt, an awareness that there is something unnarratable about the fact of death and that perhaps that may be the most significant thing theater can say about mortality.

The Atheist's Tragedy is not the last play chronologically to draw on the conventions and assumptions of the *ars moriendi* tradition. But it does represent an attempt to test some of the dramatic possibilities implicit in that tradition, and so may help us understand some of the reasons for the ultimate divergence between devotional prose writing and drama. I have tracked contrary impulses within the text. On the one hand, Tourneur seeks to revive elements of the didactic drama of the 1570's and 80's by staging a clear moral distinction between good and bad approaches to death and by conclusively affirming the former at the expense of the latter. On the other hand, his citational method of composition shows him to be keenly aware of, and indeed interested in exploiting for dramatic effect, the ways in which repetition and imitation of exemplary narratives in different contexts threatens to empty them of content. The denouement apparently stands as an emphatic affirmation of the orthodox values against D'Amville's atheistic beliefs. However, it is hard to see how the event of D'Amville's death can ultimately escape this citational logic he had earlier exploited. In this context, the very orthodoxy with which the play affirms providence starts to look sensationalist and parodic. *The Atheist's Tragedy*, therefore, represents a sort of limit case for dramatic appropriations of good deaths, at once striving to dramatize a Christian *ars moriendi* sincerely, and showing how the very seriousness with which representations of the

good death have been taken in the theater, and their portability for discussing wider social, theological and political questions, threatens to undermine their utility as examples. If there are any moments in the play that resist the sense that iteration, even sincere and respectful iteration, tends to cheapen the models upon which it is based, it is representations of dying through the nonverbal syllable “O,” which only seems to become more recalcitrant the more it is repeated in different contexts. Dying groans within the play conform to neither a materialist nor a providentialist narrative, but rather imply skepticism about the possibility of narrativizing death at all. *The Atheist's Tragedy* implies that this is the direction towards which all theatrical *ars moriendi* tends.

¹ For example, see the dialogue between the *moriens* and the devil in Erasmus's *Preparatione to Deathe* (62-63) and the whole of Thomas Becon's *The Sicke Mans Salve*.

² See discussions of antitheatricality in Jonas Barish, *The Antitheatrical Prejudice* and Peter Lake and Michael C. Questier, *The Anti-Christ's lewd hat*. William Perkins discusses players' (and others') abuses of sumptuary laws in *The Whole Treatise of the Cases of Conscience* (Cambridge: 1608), III.4. His *ars moriendi* text is the 1595 *A Salve for a Sicke Man* (in *The English Ars Moriendi*).

³ On the *Hamlet* references, see Paul A. Cantor "Cyril Tourneur." *Jacobean and Caroline Dramatists*, ed. Fredson Bowers, Dictionary of Literary Biography, Vol. 58 (Detroit: Gale Research, 1987). On *Doctor Faustus*, see Katherine Eisaman Maus, ed. *Four Revenge Tragedies* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995) 417n. On the influence of Chapman, see Clifford Leech "The Atheist's Tragedy as a Dramatic Comment on Chapman's Bussy Plays, *The Journal of English and Germanic Philology*, 52, no. 4 (1953): 525-530.

⁴ Cyril Tourneur, *The Atheist's Tragedy* in *Four Revenge Tragedies*, ed. Katherine Eisaman Maus (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995) 4.3.273-74. All subsequent references will be given in the text.

⁵ Cantor, n.p. Note that Cantor is operating under the assumption that Tourneur also wrote *The Revenger's Tragedy*, and this assessment refers to both plays.

⁶ Anja Müller-Wood links *The Atheist's Tragedy* to Walter Benjamin's understanding of allegory, arguing that the play exhibits a characteristically baroque pessimism that objects found in the world are capable of sustaining fixed or transcendent meanings. She suggests that for Tourneur, this pessimism is particularly attached to anxieties about the purposes of rhetoric, and skepticism of the possibility of a transparent language. See Anja Müller-Wood, *The Theatre of Civilized Excess: New Perspectives on Jacobean Tragedy* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2007) 90-92.

⁷ Walter Benjamin, *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*, 178.

⁸ See William E. Gruber "Building a Scene: The Text and its Representation in *The Atheist's Tragedy*" *Comparative Drama* 19 (1985): 193-208, for a reading of Levidulcia's death in relation to patriarchy. The defamiliarization Guber sees occurring in the moment of Levidulcia's death is somewhat akin to the reading I will give of Montferrers and Rousard. The precise understanding of shame that Levidulcia evokes reflects Augustine's skeptical take on her suicide in *The City of God* (I.19).

⁹ See Willem Schrickx, "Cyril Tourneur, War Correspondent, Spy and Author of "Extremities Urging Sir Francis Vere to the Anti-Parle," *Neophilologus*, 78, no. 2 (1994): 315-27.

¹⁰ See Troni Grande's reading of the poem in *Marlovian Tragedy: The Play of Dilation* (Lewisburg, PA: Bucknell University Press, 1999), 25-43.

¹¹ Martin Fotherby suggests that a fear of death (along with fear of sleep and fear of thunder) is particularly characteristic of atheists. *Atheomastix clearing foure truthes, against atheists and infidels: 1. That, there is a God. 2. That, there is but one God. 3. That, Iehouah, our God, is that one God. 4. That, the Holy Scripture is the Word of that God. All of them proued, by naturall reasons, and secular authorities; for the reducing of infidels: and, by Scriptures, and Fathers, for the confirming of Christians.* (London, 1622), 131.

¹² *Doctor Faustus*, 5.2.85-89.

¹³ See for example Erasmus, "Sondry be the formes of tntations by whiche God trieth his men of warre, but the most greuous tentation of all is death. For than in good earnest, we must fight hande to hande, nor there is no skipping away, but on both sides, with all our myghte and power, the maystrie must be tried" (*Preparatione to Deathe*, 52).

¹⁴ Maus argues that some of Rousard's symptoms suggest his complaint is syphilis (407n).

¹⁵ Elaine Scarry, *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), 4.

¹⁶ "Preverbal" is Scarry's word, and implies a single axis on which linguistic progression and regression can be located. Since I am interested in tracking the incommensurability between language and cries of pain within the play I have preferred "nonverbal" throughout.

¹⁷ Jeremy Taylor, *Holy Dying*, 71. Admittedly Taylor's 1650 text postdates *The Atheist's Tragedy* by several decades. However, Perkins makes essentially the same point in 1595: "it may be alledged that in the pangs of death men want their senses & convenient utterance, and therefore they are vnable to pray. Ans. The very sighes, sobs, and grones of a repentant and beleeuing heart are praiers before God, euen as effectuell as if they were uttered by the best voice in the world. Praier stands in the affection of the hart. The voice is but an outward messenger thereof (*A Salve for a Sicke Man*, 158).

¹⁸ Taylor, 73.

¹⁹ A number of critics have considered the implications of sonic resonances between verbal and nonverbal interjections in drama. Joel Feinman observes a pattern of O sounds in *Othello* which he equates with Lacan's *objet a* in "The Sound of O in *Othello*" in *The Subjectivity Effect in Western Literary Tradition* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1991), 143-64. Bruce N. Smith surveys the acoustic landscape of Early Modern England more generally, arguing for continual circulation between verbal and nonverbal forms of sound and the production of meaning across the different registers in *The Acoustic World of Early Modern England* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1999). Nicole Loraux discusses ancient Greek drama but comes closest to identifying the dynamic I am

interested in. In *The Mourning Voice: An Essay on Greek Tragedy*, trans. Elizabeth Trapnell Rawlings (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2002), she identifies how syllables traditionally used in mourning rituals emerge within tragic dialogue and enable a hidden grieving that cannot be expressed in Athenian masculine military culture to be articulated.

²⁰ Francis Beaumont, *The Knight of the Burning Pestle*, (London: A&C Black, 2002) 5.335.

²¹ The closest approximations to such a repurposing that I have been able to identify are the repeated O's uttered by Beatrice-Joanna while she is in the closet with De Flores in Thomas Middleton's *The Changeling* (in *Five Plays*, ed. Brian Loughrey and Neil Taylor [London: Penguin, 1988] 5.3.139-40). Until she emerges, bleeding to death, the audience is uncertain whether her cries signify injury or a sexual encounter. Death groans do not so much prove susceptible to deflating refiguring as they suggest that biological death might be merely one way in which an annihilating encounter with the real (that could only be registered nonverbally) could manifest.

²² Peter B. Murray, rather desperately, suggests that D'Amville misses his swing because of the alcohol in the glass of wine he drinks. See Peter B. Murray, *A Study of Cyril Tourneur* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1964).

²³ Huston Diehl offers a slightly different link between *The Atheist's Tragedy* and homiletic tragedy, arguing that the homiletic tragedies provide a precedent for seeing an analogy between trial scenes and the last judgment in "'Reduce Thy Understanding to thine Eye:' Seeing and Interpreting in *The Atheist's Tragedy*," *Studies in Philology*, 78 (1981): 56.

²⁴ Compare Diehl's argument that the play teaches a practice of Christian reading of the world.

²⁵ Robert Ornstein, "The Atheist's Tragedy," *Notes and Queries*, (1955): 284-85; G.F. Waller, "Time, Providence and Tragedy in *The Atheist's Tragedy* and *King Lear*," *English Miscellany: A Symposium of History, Literature and the Arts*, 23 (1972): 59.

²⁶ Thomas Beard, *The theatre of Gods iudgements: or, a collection of histories out of sacred, ecclesiasticall, and prophane authours concerning the admirable iudgements of God vpon the transgressours of his commandements*. (London, 1597), 148.

²⁷ See R.J. Kaufmann, "Theodicy, Tragedy and the Psalmist: Tourneur's *Atheist's Tragedy*" *Comparative Drama*, 3, (1969): 260.

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---. *Henrici VI Angliae Regis Miracula Postuma* (c. 1500) ed. Paulius Grosjean, (Brussels: Societe des Bollandistes, 1935).

---. *Here begynneth a treatyse how ye hye fader of heuen sendeth dethe to somon euery creature to come and gyue a counte of theyr lyues in this worlde and is in maner of a morall playe* (London: 1528).

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